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## LITERACY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

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## *LiCS* MISSION STATEMENT

*Literacy in Composition Studies* is a refereed open access online journal that sponsors scholarly activity at the nexus of Literacy and Composition Studies. We foreground *literacy* and *composition* as our keywords because they do particular kinds of work. We want to retain Composition's complicated history as well as FYC's institutional location and articulation to secondary education. Through literacy, we denote practices that are both deeply context-bound and always ideological. Literacy and Composition are therefore contested terms that often mark where the struggles to define literate subjects and confer literacy's value are enacted. We are committed to publishing scholarship that explores literacy at its intersection with Composition's history, pedagogies, and interdisciplinary methods of inquiry.

Literacy is a fluid and contextual term. It can name a range of activities from fundamental knowledge about how to decode text to interpretive and communicative acts. Literacies are linked to know-how, to insider knowledge, and literacy is often a metaphor for the ability to navigate systems, cultures, and situations. At its heart, literacy is linked to interpretation—to reading the social environment and engaging and remaking that environment through communication. Orienting a Composition Studies journal around literacy prompts us to investigate the ways that writing is interpretive as well as persuasive; to analyze the connections and disconnections between writing and reading; and to examine the ways in which literacy acts on or constitutes the writer even as the writer seeks to act on or with others.

*LiCS* seeks submissions that interpret literacy at a time of radical transformation in its contexts and circulation. We are open to a wide range of research that takes up these issues, and we are especially interested in work that:

- provides provisional frameworks for theorizing literacy activities
- analyzes how literacy practices construct student, community, and other identities
- investigates the ways in which social, political, economic, and technological transformations produce, eliminate, or mediate literacy opportunities
- analyzes the processes whereby literacies are valued or legitimated
- examines the literacies sponsored through college writing courses and curricula, including the range of literate activities, practices, and pedagogies that shape and inform, enable and constrain writing
- considers the implications of institutional, state, or national policies on literacy learning and teaching, including the articulation of high schools and higher education
- proposes or creates opportunities for new interactions between Literacy and Composition Studies, especially those drawing on transnational and cross-cultural literacy research

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The idea for *Literacy in Composition Studies (LiCS)* emerged from a series of conversations fueled by coffee and dinners at national conferences over four years. Year after year we would find ourselves once again talking about what we were looking for—at CCCC, in publications—and weren't easily finding: scholarship which did theoretical work at the intersection of Literacy Studies and Composition Studies. Eventually, we realized it might be up to us to create the platform for the kind of work we wanted to be reading. We are lucky to be launching *LiCS* at a time when online academic journals are both possible and reputable; likewise, we have benefitted from models of great independent journal publishing like *Kairos*, *Reflections*, and *Community Literacy Journal*.

The symposium that launches this inaugural issue speaks to our concerns and raises new ones. The symposium call invited writers to submit short essays that addressed the current intersections between Literacy Studies and Composition and the implications of Literacy Studies research, theory, and practice for Composition Studies. Respondents were then asked to extend the conversation about issues raised or neglected in the symposium. We are delighted by the range of voices, perspectives, and sites this dialogue represents. As our mission statement makes clear, we hope that *LiCS* will emerge as a journal in which cross-national conversations will confront literacy issues at all levels, bridging lines of theory and inquiry between these two overlapping fields.

The socio-cultural and economic changes attending new technologies and globalization—not to mention the response to such changes—suggest to us that now is the right time for this journal. Teacher-scholars are questioning prevailing methodologies for analyzing literacy practices, revisiting foundational theories of literacy, and unpacking the ideological meanings of literacy at work in educational policy and scholarship. It is a transformational time for Composition—as Allan Luke asks in this issue, “Can the field keep up?” We believe more conversation between Literacy and Composition scholars can help provide generative ways to meet this challenge head-on.

As we launch this endeavor, we want to thank our Editorial Board and Editorial Associates for their support, especially those who contributed to this issue. We note, in particular, the ethical and intellectual example of Mariolina Salvatori, who seeded our interest in literacy many years ago. We are indebted to Steve Parks for helping us conceptualize the journal and its workflow. We appreciate the time and talent of Justin Lewis for bringing us online. Finally, we believe the ideas in this issue begin an important conversation at the nexus of Literacy Studies and Composition, and we look forward to continuing this conversation, with you, in the issues ahead.

Brenda Glascott, *California State University, San Bernardino*  
Tara Lockhart, *San Francisco State University*  
Holly Middleton, *High Point University*  
Richard Parent, *University of Vermont*  
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# Ideologies of Literacy, “Academic Literacies,” and Composition Studies

Bruce Horner

In my contribution to this symposium, I take up the call of this journal in its mission statement for “new interactions between Literacy and Composition Studies.” From the framework of competing ideologies of literacy, I explore points of intersection as well as divergence between strands of what’s known as “composition studies” and what has come to be identified as the “academic literacies” approach to academic literacy. My focus on “academic literacies” rather than the broader area of literacy studies signals at least three of my biases: first, I wish to counter the tendency to allow the cultural norm for academic literacy to go unchallenged, a tendency that a focus on those literacy practices deemed nonacademic risks maintaining; second, and relatedly, insofar as work in composition studies remains tied by its location in the academy to programs charged with the study and teaching of academic writing, those of us identified with composition cannot allow cultural norms for academic literacy to go unchallenged; and third, some of the most promising work challenging such norms can be found in work taking an academic literacies approach.

On the working assumption that the majority of this journal’s readers will identify with “composition studies” rather than with “literacy studies,” I start with a sketch, entirely partial, of the “academic literacies” tradition. That tradition grows out, and represents a powerful segment, of the larger research tradition of language ethnography identified with the work of such figures as Brian Street, David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanič that has come to be known as the New Literacy Studies, or “NLS” (see Street, “New”). To delineate some of that tradition’s key contours relevant to grasping points of useful intersection between the academic literacies approach and composition, I begin with a quick review of Street’s now well known concept, and critique, of the ideology of autonomous literacy (Street, *Literacy*). Much of the work of Street and his colleagues and students has been directed at exposing the ideological character of the autonomous model of literacy, in at least three interrelated ways. First, it demonstrates that individuals whom that model defines as illiterate in fact display behaviors that can reasonably be identified as literate. In so doing, their work places what does pass for literacy *tout court* according to that autonomous model in the context of a plurality of other, largely unrecognized literacies, hence the NLS tradition’s trademark insistence on use of the plural form literac-ies. In other words, their work has contributed to broadening the range of actors and activities that can be recognized as “literate.” Second, their work demonstrates that, contrary to the ideology of

the autonomous model of literacy, the set of actors and activities which that ideology does recognize as “literate” is neither homogeneous, uniform, discrete, nor stable in character but rather a constantly shifting set of unstable, internally various, fluid, and heterogeneous practices—“social practices” but, importantly, “social” in the sense of “social historical” involving change and vulnerability to transformation (see Lea and Street 159). Hence, Lea and Street distinguish the “academic literacies” approach from not only what they term the “academic skills” approach but also the “academic socialization” approach. Third, in demonstrating the invalidity of the autonomous model’s claims for literacy, their work demonstrates that the model is ideological not only in the sense of being at variance with the facts on the ground—i.e., as a set of “un-grounded” beliefs—but also in the sense of working in the interests of some and against the interests of others—for example, those whose literacy is refused recognition. In other words, the autonomous model is powerful in claiming an autonomy for literacy that hides its ideological character, purporting to offer literacy as an ideologically neutral phenomenon—a gift to the unfortunate, who can thence be blamed for failing to make appropriate, grateful use of it to improve themselves. By contrast, what Street calls the “ideological” model of literacy takes the ideological character of all literacy and its study, and hence takes conflict, as inevitable givens.

The “academic literacies” approach builds especially on the second and third of these forms of critique. As the insistent use of the plural form by those taking this approach suggests, academic literacies scholars have demonstrated that the specific form of literacy with which literacy *tout court* has often been conflated—i.e., academic “essayist” literacy—is “it-self” not singular but plural, notwithstanding claims to the contrary by those charged with its/their inculcation and evaluation (see for example Lea and Street). One effect of this work has been an alignment and overlap of at least some of the research taking an academic literacies approach with strands of work in writing in the disciplines (WID) highlighting differences in the kinds of writing practices valued and engaged in by specific disciplines, and with work on “English for Academic Purposes” (EAP) and “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP). However, in keeping with its view of literacy practices as not merely “social” but “social historical,” work taking an “academic literacies” approach differs from significant strands of work in WID, EAP, and ESP in its rejection of the normativity of these various literacy practices and, instead, its subjection of these to critique for what they disallow, including students’ literacy practices not granted institutional recognition as literacy practices, and by its call for exploring and valorizing the potential transformation of academic literacy practices by, for example, considering alternatives to them (see Lillis and Scott 12-13).

My account so far might suggest that the academic literacies approach arises out of a theoretical construct—the ideology of the autonomous model of literacy (and its converse, the ideological model of literacy)—which was then applied to the specific case of academic literacy/ies. A full account of the development of the “academic literacies” approach is beyond the scope of this contribution. However, it’s worth recalling that the development of

an academic literacies approach emerged at least in part as a response to teacher-scholars' encounters in higher education with new populations of students with a far greater diversity of language and literacy practices than previously, as a consequence of the massification of higher education in the UK and elsewhere (see Lillis and Scott 7-9). Like their counterparts in the U.S. facing students admitted under open admissions programs who, as Shaughnessy put it, seemed like "strangers in their own land," these teachers began to question the norms of academic literacy they had been charged with inculcating. While (like counterparts elsewhere) not all teachers have responded in this way—some instead attempting simply to better identify academic writing practices and then induct students into them—a significant minority has adopted the explicitly ideological stance now identified as an "academic literacies" approach.

I am suggesting, then, several overlaps between the work of those taking an "academic literacies" approach to academic writing and the work of at least some compositionists: the recognition of a plurality of kinds of literacy, including a plurality of kinds of academic literacies; an insistence on the ideological character of all literacies and claims about them, including their relative value; the genesis of that recognition and insistence in teachers' encounters with students, and student literacy practices, previously excluded from higher education; and a desire to explore ways by which academic literacy/ies might be transformed to counter noxious power relations advanced by dominant ideologies of academic literacy as "autonomous"—a single set of stable, discrete, internally uniform, politically neutral skills. But the identification of the overlapping positions themselves can lead to neglect of important differences in the local conditions of work and the history and effects of those conditions. Within the space of this symposium, I'll restrict my attention in what follows to the effects of two linked differences in such conditions on the work identified with either and both, and one similarity in those conditions.

The two linked differences on which I'll focus are in the institutional "homes" of those taking up such work in either language education or "English studies," and the research methodologies deployed to study academic writing. Lillis and Scott have noted that "teacher-researchers have drawn on the available and influential paradigms in their specific geo-historical contexts" (9). In the U.S., those contexts include first-year composition, the common location of writing courses and programs in departments of English, and their staffing by those trained in the research traditions of English studies. Given such a location, it is not surprising that, as Lillis and Scott note, the paradigms that predominate in U.S. studies of writing, a.k.a. "composition," are drawn from theories from literary, rhetorical, cultural, and post-colonial studies (9). This has led to a pronounced focus on "the text," with problems, policies and solutions defined in terms of texts: errors, organization, format, conventions, genre, even "mode." Scholarship in this vein tends to take the form of competing "readings" of student (and other) writing, often derived from the practice of the "close reading" of literary texts (see, for example, Bartholomae, "Study," "Inventing"; Lu and Horner; Miller; Salvatori; Shaughnessy). At its worst, this textual bias can lead to overlooking significant features of the immediate and larger sociohistorical contexts in which specific texts emerge that might account in contradictory ways for the textual features under study.

Conversely, the institutional location of many of those teacher-scholars taking an academic lit-

eracies approach in departments and programs of language and education has led to an emphasis on practice over text (Lillis and Scott 10-11). Such an emphasis draws on research traditions associated with anthropology and the sociology of knowledge, and typically takes the form of empirical studies in language ethnography: as Lillis and Scott put it, "the observation of the practices surrounding the production of texts—rather than focusing solely on written texts—as well as participants' perspectives on the texts and practices," with the concept of *practice* used to link language with context and culture (Lillis and Scott 11). This focus risks neglecting the ways in which writing mediates language, situation, and context, the potential of intervention in these through writing and writing pedagogy, and an overstating of the role of context in writing as determinative. It is this risk that has prompted cautions such as Gee's reminder, in response to work in New Literacy Studies emphasizing the situated character of literacy, that "[s]ituations (contexts) do not just exist . . . [but] are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing *work*" (190).

Of course, the specific limitations which the research methodologies of specific institutional locations make teacher-scholars inhabiting them prone point both to the limits of the "local"—here understood in terms of disciplinary and institutional "home" and larger sociopolitical context—and to the potential of translocal research. As this journal's mission statement makes clear, those limits, and that potential, are broadly recognized. What I will now offer here, as a kind of heuristic, is identification of a feature shared by both: the tendency to evacuate the temporal dimension of both "text" and "context" through their location in primarily spatial terms. As suggested by the quotation from Gee above and my reference to writing's mediation of language, situation, and context, neglect of the temporal dimension of literacy acts can lead not merely to a stabilizing of text or context at odds with their always emergent character—the unavoidable effect of a synchronic focus requisite to some kinds of analysis—but also to the paradoxical fetishizing of the features of what has been stabilized that, paradoxically, engenders conceptual dilemmas for the project of contesting the dominant ideology of the autonomous model of literacy and the power relations it perpetuates. So, for example, a focus on formal features of "the text" and conventional textual modalities can lead to making a fetish of specific deviations from what are thought to be formal features of academic writing: by changing these features—for example, by mixing languages, or composing in a manner recognized as "multi-modal"—it is hoped that academic writing can thereby be transformed. Thus a change to a specific textual object is equated with changes to a practice.

The seemingly tautological nature of this belief—change writing to change writing—is an effect of the ideology of the autonomous model of literacy and its restricted definition of what constitutes "writing," and thus works to sustain that ideology's treatment of literacy as in fact autonomous. As Street has recently cautioned in response to shifts of attention to a plethora of newly identified "literacies," "such a shift may take us back to earlier autonomous approaches, both with respect to the view of literacy as skill and to the notion that each communicative practice has its own 'affordances' or determinations" ("Future" 32). Each literacy can come to be understood as capable by itself of producing specific effects without the labor of writer and readers. The effort to counter the fetishizing of conventional academic literacy can thus simply lead to additional, even complementary, fetishes that, as in the treatment of literacy—or academic literacy—as autonomous, occlude the labor of reading

and writing. Texts, so conceived, are treated as stable and discrete rather than, as Raymond Williams has observed, merely “notations [which] have then to be interpreted in an active way” (*Problems* 47).

Williams makes this observation in arguing for the need to shift analyses from “isolating the object and then discovering its components” to studying “the nature of a practice and then its conditions” (*Problems* 47). It would thus appear to be aligned with the emphasis given by those adopting an academic literacies approach to literacy practices rather than to textual artifacts. However, that shift itself can falter when it then objectifies sets of such practices and conditions, rendering them stable, internally uniform, and discrete through locating them in terms of space but not temporally as the always emerging products of actions. Such spatialization can then contribute to fetishizing specific “local” practices and contexts as in themselves producing specific effects, romanticizing of these as “local” (now understood as an honorific), and to neglecting the interplay of the “local” and “distant” (or “global”) as well as the inevitable relocalizing of the global and globalizing of the “local.” Attribution of autonomy to the “global” is then complemented with attribution of autonomy to the local as well, with equally problematic results. For example, as Hull and Schultz observe, there is then a tendency to “build and reify a great divide between in school and out of school . . . relegat[ing] all good things to out-of-school contexts and everything repressive to school,” or, alternatively, treating “non-school learning as merely frivolous or remedial or incidental” (3).

In either case—fetishizing specific, ostensibly “alternative” textual forms (within the medium of alphabetic print or using other media *as* alternative to conventionally alphabetic print texts), or fetishizing specific literacy practices and contexts alternative to those identified as “academic”—the “new” in New Literacy Studies, applied to academic literacies, can come to be understood as a modification not to the ways in which literacy is conceptualized and studied but to the forms of literacy themselves, now approached as autonomous rather than ideological (see Street, “New” 28). Thus in place of approaching invocations of any literacy as inevitably ideological, efforts are directed at identifying new literacies and literacy practices as constituting breaks *from* the ideological: an instance of making a fetish of what dominant ideology leads us to recognize as “the new” as a means, in itself, of accomplishing social change.

We can account for the conflation of new conceptualizations of writing with new forms of texts and with practices that appear to deviate from academic norms in at least three ways. First and most obviously, it is testimony to the hegemonic power of notions of literacy as, in fact, autonomous. For, after all, the ideology of the autonomous model of literacy is not something to be simply shucked off. Rather, as Bourdieu cautions, an ideology of language “has nothing in common with an explicitly professed, deliberate and revocable belief, or with an intentional act of accepting a ‘norm.’ It is inscribed, in a practical state, in dispositions which are impalpably inculcated, through a long and slow process of acquisition, by the sanctions of the linguistic market”(51).

Second, the fact that an ideological model of academic literacy emerged in response to the arrival in higher education of populations who themselves deviated from the cultural “norm” for students has encouraged conflation of textual forms and literacy practices with specific populations and their “home” cultures, understood and located in purely spatial terms as discrete and distant, thanks to the broader and more powerful ideology of monolingualism identifying language with

social identity (see Gal and Irvine). Dominant ideologies of language and literacy have predisposed teacher-scholars to then focus on and treat as new/different from the “academic” those literacies identified with locations likewise seen as new/different.

Third, historically, the fact that the emergence of new literacy technologies has made newly visible *as* technologies those literacy technologies that previously had been taken for granted as, and equated with, literacy has led to a conflation of an exploration of these new technologies with breaks from the autonomous model of literacy, while leaving intact the ideology supporting that model. Pluralization of literacy forms, technologies, and practices understood within and accommodated by the framework of the ideology of the autonomous model of literacy can then substitute for radical challenges to that ideology. So, just as multilingualism in many ways can represent a pluralization of monolinguist beliefs—leaving intact monolinguist conceptions of languages as stable, discrete, internally uniform entities linked to specific social identities likewise conceived as stable, discrete, and internally uniform (see Makoni and Pennycook)—a recognition of the legitimacy of new literacies, including new forms of academic literacies, can pluralize the old autonomous model of literacy while leaving intact its ideology of literacies as stable, discrete commodities by definition autonomous “with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race” (Marx 164-65).

To crudely characterize the phenomena I have been attempting merely to sketch, we might say that those taking an academic literacies approach have brought their attention to vernacular literacies outside the ideological center of academic literacy—a prevalent focus of traditions of language ethnography—to their reconsideration of academic literacies, whereas composition teacher-scholars have begun with a focus on academic literacies which has then broadened to address literacies beyond the academy, which have then come to be valorized as alternatives to the academic literacies which have traditionally been their object of concern. Given the long history of the denigration of subordinated groups as “illiterate” effected through invocations of the ideology of the autonomous model of literacy, it is not surprising that in both cases, teacher-scholars have directed their efforts at defending the legitimacy of the texts and practices ascribed to these groups as, indeed, meriting to be identified as “literate”—i.e., as evidence of intelligence, thought, logic, care, and so on. And such efforts continue to be necessary and valuable in the face of ongoing claims that these subordinate groups suffer from a culture of illiteracy, victimhood, and so on for which literacy, understood as autonomous, is offered as cure.

But in making these defenses, we need to be careful not to buy into the ideological framework responsible for that denigration in the first place. We need instead to find ways to focus on the labor of these groups as they continuously rework, and thereby renew, literacy, texts, practices, and contexts—whether deemed “academic” or otherwise. To avoid seeing ourselves as giving others something called “literacy,” as the autonomous model encourages us to do, we should not resort to seeing ourselves as givers of the honorific of “literacy” to a broader range of forms and practices. Instead we can join these others in the active work with literacy in which they have always already been engaged.

*University of Louisville*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a far more thorough account of the “academic literacies” approach on which I draw heavily here, see Lillis and Scott. For the formative description of this approach in relation to others, see Lea and Street. For other examples of works identified here with that approach and the tradition out of which it arises, see Barton and Hamilton; Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič; Ivanič; Ivanič et al.; Lillis, “Student” and *Student*; Street, *Literacy*; Turner; Wingate.

<sup>2</sup> Note that this pluralization does not mean approval of the application of “literacy” to every conceivable activity, as in “emotional literacy,” etc., in which “literacy” is used as an honorific to give more status to specific kinds of activity or knowledge (see Street, “Future”), nor does it signal that every use of the plural form constitutes alignment with the academic literacies approach (see Lillis and Scott).

<sup>3</sup> This is in concert with critiques of literacy ideologies by such figures as Deborah Brandt, James Paul Gee, and Harvey Graff.

<sup>4</sup> In composition studies, Berlin’s “Rhetoric,” and the debate responding to Hairston (see Trimbur), mark the shift toward recognizing not merely the “social” but the “ideological” character of academic literacy.

<sup>5</sup> Lillis and Scott also point to the influence of sociocultural theory on U.S. teacher-researchers addressing WAC/WID.

<sup>6</sup> For a different account of the text/context relation in recent research, see Lillis, “Ethnography.”

<sup>7</sup> Recall that commodity fetishism “reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves . . . autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race” (Marx 164-65).

<sup>8</sup> The pluralization of literacy to literacy practices, or literac-ies, may merely multiply the contexts acknowledged. For an alternative perspective directly addressing the temporal dimension of literacy contexts, conventions, and practices, see Tusting.

<sup>9</sup> On these risks and neglected possibilities, see Street, “New Literacy Studies” 41-45. On seeing language as always local practice, see Pennycook.

<sup>10</sup> On such efforts, see Watkins, *Work Time* 235.

<sup>11</sup> The power of that ideology is such that when the writers were demonstrably not from distant locations, teachers resorted to paradoxical formulations to render them so, as when Shaughnessy characterized native New Yorkers attending the City University of New York as “appearing to have come from a different country . . . true outsiders,” “strangers” (*Errors* 2, 3). On this phenomenon, see Fox, “Basic,” and Soliday, “Politics of Difference.”



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# Sponsoring Literacy Studies

Morris Young

The study of literacy over the last 40 years has undergone incredible transformation, moving from viewing literacy as a great cognitive leap in human development to situating literacy in specific social and cultural contexts to examining how the advent of new digital composing technologies may transform literacy practices. In *Composition and Rhetoric*, the study of literacy has been shaped by scholars such as Harvey Graff, Brian Street, Shirley Brice Heath, Anne Ruggles Gere, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Deborah Brandt among others, who have helped to broaden our understandings about how literacy is practiced, where it takes place, and for what purposes.

In this short essay, I want to consider, first, how literacy studies as a field has been sponsored—What work has been foundational, transformative, and innovative?—and second, to reflect on how my own study of literacy has been sponsored. In particular, I want to think about how Brandt’s concept of “sponsorship” has not only been transformative in conceptualizing the dynamics of literacy, but how it is also useful in addressing questions of equity and diversity within literacy studies. As defined by Brandt, “sponsors of literacy” are “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). It is the first part of this definition that is key to my discussion: How have sponsors who “enable, support, teach, and model” informed what we do as a field broadly, and what I have done in my own work specifically? In theorizing a deep understanding of how literacy is enacted, Brandt has helped us to see that literacy does not simply empower or provide access to resources for individuals, but perhaps most importantly creates a complex web of relationships that may sustain literate action. We might think of sponsorship itself as a literacy practice and as literate action, marshalling resources in order to create opportunities for literacy development.

## NARRATIVES OF LITERACY

In the spirit of Beth Daniell’s discussion of “narratives of literacy,” I revisit briefly a few studies of literacy that have also functioned as narratives of sponsorship, providing the theoretical and methodological frameworks that have sponsored further study of literacy. While we might think of some of these studies as providing the “grand narratives” of literacy that have been foundational to the field, we might also consider these studies as “little narratives” that have created personal touchstones in our work. For example, when I was a graduate student reading the historical and theoretical work of Harvey Graff and Deborah Brandt to understand the breadth and depth of literacy studies, it would never have occurred to me that twenty years later I might some day sit on a panel with them at a conference, be considered a colleague and friend, or even work in the same department. In this

sense, their scholarship has sponsored my own work in both grand and little ways, in both professional and personal contexts.

In his examination of literacy within and across historical periods in Western society, Harvey Graff has focused on how literacy has been used in the interests of Western culture and society and its consequences. Unlike the earlier and seminal work of Jack Goody and Ian Watt or Eric Havelock that extolled the virtues of literacy in the building of Western society and culture, Graff offers a more critical and sometimes skeptical view of the benefits of literacy. Rather, Graff argues that the “literacy myth” and the “legacies of literacy” have often promised more than literacy itself can deliver, whether that be a belief that there is an objective, quantifiable standard of literacy that can be measured and used unproblematically to compare individuals or groups, or a direct connection between literacy and material, political, or moral capital, or a growing belief in multiple literacies as a way to more accurately describe the uses and meanings of literacy (*Labyrinths* 320-21). What I have found so useful in Graff’s work is his examination of the myths and legacies of literacy within a long historical view because “historical interpretation offers potentially innovative approaches . . . to reforming questions and problems, understanding, criticism, and alternative conceptualizations and perspectives” (*Labyrinths* 320). Rather than placing literacy within the capacity of individual achievement alone or viewing literacy as a mark of social development for groups, Graff’s work allows for a structural analysis of the uses of literacy in historical contexts. This makes possible Graff’s search for “continuities and contradictions” in the history of literacy, creating more complex and nuanced understandings of literacy by looking beyond its promise and examining how literacy is more often concomitant of social and individual change than it is the origin of such change. Such a historical framework has helped me to study the history of literacy practices of Asian Americans in Hawai‘i, where the myths and legacies of American missionary contact have often been used to structure and organize social relations, using literacy as a proxy for racial and ethnic difference.

In Brian Street’s work I have found a framework in his theoretical models of literacy that helped me to understand how ideological forces shape specific beliefs about and purposes for literacy. Moving away from a strong text or autonomous model of literacy that privileges the decoding of texts as an unbiased, cognitive action outside of social context, Street offers an ideological model of literacy that views literacy as embedded within cultural and power structures that affect the ways literacy is perceived and used. For Street, literacy, or more precisely, literacy practices “refers to both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing” (*Social Literacies* 2).

An “autonomous” model of literacy, Street argues, conceptualizes literacy “in technical terms, treating it as independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character” (*Social Literacies* 5). In comparison, an “ideological” model of literacy is an approach that “signals quite explicitly that literacy practices are aspects not only of ‘culture’ but also of power structures” (*Cross-Cultural Approaches* 7). In addition to providing a method for the structural analysis of literacy practices, what makes Street’s focus on ideology and literacy practices especially useful is the attention to specific contexts and the forces that shape these contexts. By turning to specific contexts and the actions within these contexts, the

“little narratives” of literacy increasingly became the subjects of studies about literacy, especially as told through ethnography, narrative, and story in a variety of media.

While ethnographic studies of literacy in the 1970s (e.g., Scribner and Cole) began to move away from the totalizing narratives of cognitive and social development that characterized work by Goody and Watt and others toward examining language and literacy practices in specific contexts, it was work by Shirley Brice Heath that highlighted the ways that culture and community inform the development and adaptation of these practices by individuals and communities. The significance of Heath’s *Ways with Words* is its focus on the literacy practices of two rural communities within the contexts of these two communities rather than in comparison to some abstraction of literacy and levels of educational achievement. Heath argues that the purposes and forms of literacy can look very different than what we commonly expect in the various uses emphasized and privileged in school (i.e., essayist, literary, critical, or informational). The rich texture of a study like Heath’s provides the depth to studies about literacy that is often lost when grand conclusions about the consequences and power of literacy become more significant than understanding actual practices. Here was a model that helped me to see that studying the use of alternative literacy and language practices did not have to be done in relation to or in comparison with dominant literacy practices, that literacy used in marginalized communities could be studied on its own terms.

Building upon the work of Graff, Street, Heath, and others, studies of literacy have continued in the direction of the social turn, focusing on literacy in clearly defined social and historical contexts, and seeking to examine the uses of literacy by specific groups for specific purposes. In *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880–1920*, Anne Ruggles Gere examines women’s clubs of the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, arguing that important cultural work through reading and writing took place. Whether it was taking up the political issues of the day or considering matters that were closer to home, Gere argues that women of diverse backgrounds did use literacy for multiple purposes in extracurricular contexts and not simply as extensions of schooled literacy or for personal matters alone. In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among American Women*, Jacqueline Jones Royster focuses on the literacy and rhetorical practices of nineteenth-century African American women. However, in unpacking and examining these practices and histories, Royster also theorizes and unpacks her own ideologies, examining the complex matrix of race, gender, culture, and the histories that have shaped her own position as a scholar and teacher. And in *Literacy in American Lives*, Deborah Brandt documents and analyzes how a cross section of Wisconsin residents have defined, used, and reshaped the meaning of literacy. Through the development of the concepts of “sponsors of literacy” and the “accumulation” of literacy, Brandt illustrates how these “ordinary” Americans come to acquire and put to use reading and writing, as well as accumulate literacy as a resource that they can draw upon.

## NARRATIVES OF SPONSORSHIP

While there are many other important contributions to literacy studies, I have focused on these scholars specifically because they have served as my sponsors: their approaches to literacy have enabled, supported, taught, and modeled not only how to study literacy but also how to be a scholar

of literacy. As a graduate student in the 1990s and then as a young faculty member, I was looking to understand how literacy could be studied to include communities that were often constructed or placed on the margins of literacy. Heath's work illustrated to me how the language and literacy practices of communities of color could be studied to understand purpose and intention rather than studied to explain error and deficit. Graff's articulation of the "literacy myth" and of the "legacies of literacy" and Street's framework of autonomous and ideological models of literacy helped me to question the promise and premise of literacy, to develop a critical understanding of how histories or institutions themselves could be rhetorical and deployed to offer specific narratives about the power of literacy. Royster's historical work on the essayist tradition of African American women helped me to see that writing could be deployed in ways that not only documented the literacy practices of specific communities but also argued for a development of a sense of self and way of knowing shaped by culture, history, and material conditions.

In the work of Anne Ruggles Gere and Deborah Brandt, I have perhaps found my greatest sponsors. As others have been, my work has been shaped by Gere's discussion about the "extracurriculum of composition" and her work on women's clubs and writing groups, illustrating how the social practices of literacy extend beyond institutional spaces and function as a way for self-identified or culturally constructed groups to use writing and reading as a means of action. Or in the case of Brandt, her first book, *Literacy As Involvement*, helped me understand the shift from an understanding of literacy as autonomous, cognitive skill to socially-situated, interactive practice. Her second book, *Literacy in American Lives*, provides some of the key terms of contemporary literacy studies: accumulation, sponsorship, and literacy as resource. We see in *Literacy in American Lives* how literacy works within families, across generations, and what the impact of literacy is on the economic, cultural, and educational conditions of a range of Americans. The scholarly presence of Gere and Brandt in my own work is substantial, but the personal presence of Gere and Brandt in my professional life is what allowed me to understand that I could research the history of literacy in Hawai'i, that I could make an argument about the role literacy plays in the lives of people who are often placed on the margins because of race, culture, language, or others factors that mark them as less-literate or illiterate, or that studying literacy as a socially situated practice is important and critical work that is still often undertheorized and underexamined. Additionally, I have had the fortune to be influenced in personal ways by Harvey Graff and Jacqueline Jones Royster, and continue to return to the work of Brian Street and Shirley Brice Heath, among many others, especially when I teach courses on the study of literacy. What I have been fortunate to experience is an accumulation of literacy, where the generosity of scholars has helped me to develop my own studies of literacy, and has also helped me to understand the importance and value of mentorship in encouraging the next generation of scholars and their work.

In presenting this brief narrative about the sponsorship of literacy studies in one specific case, I hope that I have suggested that not only has our own work been informed by what we might think of as grand narratives of scholarship but also by the little narratives of personal touchstones, whether these are personal connections or more meaningful friendships, to the encouraging comment after a conference presentation, or even citing the work of an emerging scholar. While we may consider our

professional work as studying literacy and perhaps sponsoring the further study of literacy through our research, we should also recognize that we are also sponsoring literacy studies through the personal connections and relationships that develop in our curricular and extracurricular spaces and in the gestures that are often more than a simple act of acknowledgement or kindness.

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## The Legacies of Literacy Studies

Harvey Graff

Claims about literacies, and their lack, surround us, multiplying like metaphorical insects.<sup>1</sup> Different observers see either an abundance of literacies forming foundations for flowing multimodalities, or a crisis rooted in the presumed absence or inadequacy of appropriate literacies threatening the foundations of our civilization and polity.

In typical formulations, literacy studies embrace two more-or-less opposing positions: that of “many literacies” and that of dangerously low levels of literacy, their causes and their consequences. When conceptualized complexly—not the most common practice—their contradictory relationships form part of our subject of inquiry and part of the challenge for explication and explanation.

The difficulties and the potentialities attendant on literacy gave rise to a field of literacy studies during the last one-third of the twentieth century. Sociolinguist David Barton relates, “The meaning of the word literacy is to be found not just by examining dictionary entries. It has become a unifying term across a range of disciplines for changing views of reading and writing; there has been such a growth of study in the area that is now referred to as Literacy Studies or the New Literacy Studies” (23).

In the second half of the twentieth century, literacy studies developed as an *interdisciplinary* field of study. In conjunction with other disciplines and interdisciplines, literacy studies have taken social, contextual, cognitive, linguistic, and historical, among other “turns.” With the turns came the adoption of signifying French theorist “godfathers” from Levy-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss to Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour. These developments at times interact with and deepen conflicts among disciplines and promote interest in interdisciplinary resolution. Implicitly and explicitly, they also illustrate the dangers of failing to grasp this history.

Literacy studies’ paths are revealing. Recent years witness an emphasis on the everyday and the practical, including the concept of practice itself. This led to an effort at overturning the dominance of grand theories that stressed the universal importance of the written over the oral, the printed over the written, the literate over the unlettered and untutored. Practice and context, explored in a variety of contexts and traditions, replaced presumptions of the unmediated powers and advantages of literacy. In part, literacy studies’ emerging interdisciplinarity stemmed from perceptions of the inadequacy of earlier conceptualizations and presumptions, the search for new methods and sources on which to base a major revision, and reactions to it.

English studies is an important location for literacy studies (if hardly the only one). English has long claimed a special relationship with reading and writing via tutelage and practice, but more formally through subdisciplines like Rhetoric and Composition. During the last decade, RhetComp programs began to rename and sometimes reframe themselves as RCL—“L” for literacy. This act represents what I call “the lure of literacy” for currency and relevance, and enrollments and funding.



Literacy studies continue to struggle with foundational dichotomies—the making of myths—between oral and literate, writing and print, print and electronic, and literacy as transformative—that continue to guide and divide opinion and orient studies. The longstanding neglect of rich research on orality and oral literature, for example. The proponents of the New Literacy Studies have not reclaimed Lord or Parry or Vygotsky. The persistence and importance of orality is regularly rediscovered, as is the sociality of much reading and writing. The heterogeneity of constructions of the cognitive domain also plagues literacy studies, another instructive matter of connections.

Striving for recognition, literacy studies occupy ambiguous ground both disciplinarily and interdisciplinarily. In part, this is a question of location. But it is also a question of status. The “rise” of literacy studies, part of its generally successful emergence and development, contributes to its presence in a number of academic departments and disciplines: education, the social sciences, and the humanities, and to a lesser extent the sciences, medicine, public health, the law, and business. That literacy, for good reasons, is often seen as basic or elementary does not boost its academic standing. “Literacy” and “Literacy Studies” at times become promotional labels: new, relevant, sexy—in academic terms—and appealing for applied and practical reasons to citizens, governments, corporations. A sometimes unstable mix of currency, practicality, and applied “science” prompts ambivalent (or negative) responses.

Much of recent literacy studies wades in dangerous waters where ideological and interpretive sharks swim. Among the critical tensions that attest to the limits of Literacy Studies is the imbalance between the embrace of complexity and contradiction, and the great hope that in the end, the achievement of a more equal distribution of a productive mass literacy will trump social, economic, and political inequality, in other words, an abiding faith in the literacy myth. The cards of race, ethnicity, and sometimes gender play here, although it is by no means clear which factors are causes and which are consequences.

Now, there is nothing wrong with this, other than failing to embrace a consistent critical stance on the ideologies, rhetoric and discourse, cultures, and especially the political economics of literacy as conceptualized in different contexts, distributed, and experienced.

In part these complications follow from the pervasive power of the literacy myth in American culture and politics. Persuasive presumptions also limit the power of interdisciplinary concepts, methods, and understanding, or confusing political and economic ideology with the contradictory realities of structural inequalities. As a result, we lack adequate critical treatments of the contradictory place literacy holds in popular, school, familial, and public cultures. Similarly, and, more seriously, we lack an adequate political economy of literacy. Thus the non- or extra-production/consumption values and uses of literacy are less appreciated (except in studies of subgroups like adolescents or hip hop, itself a problematic circumstance). Unlike its presumed value in a “knowledge economy,” many everyday needs and uses of literacy are undervalued, not even measured metaphorically. The literacy needs of a “knowledge economy,” we easily forget, do not bring employment and rewards to all those in search of fair work and pay, *regardless* of their ability to read and write across different media and different languages. In the United States today, we may suffer simultaneously and incommensurably from literacy deficits and literacy surpluses.



Among the other consequences is the reification of dichotomies. For example, Deborah Brandt's conviction that "mass writing" has been neglected in literacy studies, despite its rising value compared to "mass reading," in a knowledge economy uncouples the two where their relationships may be more important. At this point, multiple or multimodal literacies call for attention, but not in dichotomous relationship with "traditional" or "alphabetic" literacy. "Writing revolutions" take their place in a line that looks back to reading, print, manuscript, and alphabetic revolutions.

The notion of a knowledge economy, for example, begs the question of its dichotomized other, as do production and consumption of literacy and issues of multiple media and multiple languages of communication. After several decades of sharp criticism of the autonomous, independent powers of literacy, both familiar and new hierarchies have returned. Questions of the contextualization of literacy are reopening. The roster of literacy studies' commissions and omissions is lengthy. We cannot forget, moreover, that many of the issues on which this cluster of approaches can run aground are the most important and most difficult questions demanding our attention.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See also my *Literacy Myths* and "Literacy Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies." These comments are adapted from my contribution to the session on Legacies, Gateways, and the Future of Literacy Studies, CCCC, St. Louis, March, 2012.

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## Constricting Keywords: Rhetoric and Literacy in our History Writing

Brenda Glascott

**A**s a composition historian working with nineteenth-century American literacy artifacts, I have become increasingly aware of how particular keywords have come to dominate our histories. Specifically, I have noticed how the keyword that most resonates with my research—literacy—has been eclipsed and to some extent erased by the dominance of the keyword “rhetoric” in our history writing over the last decade. Why has this happened? How does this trend affect the materials historians look for and the questions they ask? How do our keywords modulate the voices of our artifacts? How do our keywords determine the uses we claim for history?

I have surveyed book-length American composition histories published between 1999 and 2010 in order to describe the major trends shaping the kinds of histories we are producing to see if we can identify gaps and fissures, the roads not taken, in relation to these major trends. The preliminary thesis I put before you is that we are in danger of closing off certain types of materials and questions because our histories are increasingly dominated by the keyword “rhetoric.”

Raymond Williams, in constructing his keywords project, would choose a word because it “virtually forced itself on my attention because the problems of its meanings seemed to me inextricably bound up with the problems it was being used to discuss” (15). Williams’s description of the ways our keywords are simultaneously epistemological and fraught with “problems of meaning” is particularly useful for thinking about how history is summoned by the present and circumscribed by the language we use in the summoning. Historians and archivists work with partial vision: our keywords, key questions, key interests point our gaze in certain directions and there is little assurance we are not missing important elements just beyond our peripheral vision.

The recovery work by feminist historiographers in the past forty years has served as a corrective lens to traditional vision. From this work, we have recognized that women have been disappeared from canonical historical traditions and that recovery efforts must ask different types of questions of different types of material to unearth women’s traditions. In rhetoric, feminist historians have looked beyond rhetorical theory to conduct manuals, diaries, and letters, for instance. Particularly over the last decade, feminist historians of rhetoric have looked for women as public speakers in the nineteenth-century United States. They have been concerned with how our historical tradition has silenced women, and in response these historians have tried to ask the right questions to unearth their voices. The restoration of these women’s voices is invaluable. But, knowing that our keywords lead to certain key questions and recognizing that there is a developing orthodoxy about describing

women as language users in the nineteenth century, we need to continually challenge ourselves about the limitations imposed by our keywords. So the question I pose today is, how do questions anchored by “rhetoric” prepare our ears to hear voices differently from questions anchored by “literacy” in the historical record?

I identify “literacy” as the countering keyword here for a number of reasons: 1. As I read the record of our histories, “literacy” has been a strong alternative to “rhetoric” in our history construction, especially as it adapts itself easily to the composition side of our composition/rhetoric dyad. 2. Literacy has been deployed as a synonym for or close relative to rhetoric, and frequently the definitions of these terms bleed into each other even in the same text. 3. Even James Berlin’s foundational history, *Rhetoric and Reality*, starts with this sentence: “Literacy has always and everywhere been the center of the educational enterprise” (1). I will return in a little while to what I think the keyword “literacy” accomplishes for historians.

### DESCRIBING THE TERRAIN

I surveyed fifteen book-length nineteenth-century American composition histories published since 1999. I read for the keywords framing the questions the historians asked and the materials they investigated. I also charted out the citation trends in these books to see which writers were cited or were excluded from the relevant scholarship. Based on citation and keyword trends as well as the artifacts identified and examined by the histories I also visually mapped the continuum between rhetoric and literacy oriented histories.

There are general trends one notices when creating an archive of contemporary histories of composition/rhetoric. Where “rhetoric” is the keyword, the historians are often working on recovery projects, identifying and placing particular individuals in our history. Perhaps because of this emphasis on recovery, rhetoric-driven histories also tend to suggest that the usefulness of these histories is that they can recover potentially forgotten practices we might use today. Histories motivated by rhetoric often tend to focus on the public or civic realm; this orientation combines with an Aristotelian emphasis on audience to set up a situation where the historian focuses on how the writer or speaker tries to move or accommodate others. Finally, there is a notable use of classical rhetorical theorists in histories motivated by rhetoric as their keyword: in these histories the contemporary scholar uses classical rhetorical theory to describe and analyze their nineteenth-century material. This is a distinct contrast to histories motivated by literacy in which scholars treat classical rhetorical theory as a primary source to be analyzed instead of a secondary source to be used as an analytic frame. Below are some other specific trends:

Both rhetoric and literacy motivated histories examine similar artifacts, including letters, memoirs, diaries, and textbooks. There are, however, artifacts we can identify as linked to the contrasting keywords of rhetoric and literacy. Rhetoric historians evince particular interest in oratory and public speaking, an interest which coincides with rhetoric’s focus on audience, persuasion, and Burkean cooperation. On the other hand, literacy histories incorporate imaginative writing, including fiction. Rhetoric historians do at times refer to literature but they often don’t work with it in the same way

literacy historians do, who tend to incorporate literary studies approaches to literature. It's worth mentioning that when rhetoric-identified scholar Roxanne Mountford does interesting work with nineteenth-century literature in *The Gendered Pulpit*, she feels compelled to write,

So why turn to literary examples to explore a real-life phenomenon, the gendered nature of the pulpit? Because writers, like all spectators of life, offer a fresh lens for understanding the nature of rhetoric . . . . Who better to explain what an audience understands instinctively than a novelist? Of course, the average person is unlikely to encounter a preacher climbing a rope ladder to reach his pulpit, but they are likely to encounter pulpits with staircases, as I point out later in this chapter. Through this literary exaggeration of a common rhetorical space, Melville illustrates a profoundly important matter about the nature of pulpits: as architecture they communicate something to the audience quite apart from the sermon itself. They have communicative powers of their own. (23)

That Mountford feels the need to defend her use of literary texts as part of a rhetorical historical study is instructive. It is a symptom of what Steven Mailloux has described as the "reception/production antagonism" within what he characterizes as broad rhetorical study (96). Mailloux hopes to reintegrate the "fragments" of rhetoric which have been differentiated as reception disciplines—"literary and cultural studies"—and production disciplines—composition and rhetoric—under the label "rhetorical hermeneutics," which is "*the intersection of cultural rhetoric study and rhetorical pragmatism*" (97, 100 italics in original). Both Mountford's defense of her use of Melville and Mailloux's argument in favor of reintegrating rhetoric and literary/cultural studies attests to a limitation of rhetoric as a keyword in historical study. This particular limitation does not apply to "literacy" as a keyword since literacy refers both to reception and production activities and artifacts.

The ways the historians define rhetoric and literacy often overlap. Nan Johnson labels "speaking and writing" as "rhetorical skills" (21); Shirley Wilson Logan likewise identifies "reading, writing, speaking, listening" as "rhetorical arts" (*Sites*, 7). Logan amplifies this definition when she associates "rhetorical skills" with "reading, writing, debating, keeping diaries, gathering in associations, [and] editing newspapers" (23). The activities identified as rhetorical by rhetoric scholars are the same activities literacy scholars associate with literacy. Jacqueline Jones Royster, for instance, associates literacy with "communicative competence," which envelopes all of the language activities identified by the rhetoricians above. Even more significantly, Royster writes that "a useful definition of literacy is that it is a sociocognitive ability. It is the ability to gain access to information and to use this information variously to articulate lives and experiences and also to identify, think through, refine, and solve problems, sometimes complex problems, over time" (45). For Royster, literacy is both other- and self-directed. The literate person communicates with others by "articulat[ing] lives and experiences" while also self-reflexively exploring "problems" which may become open-ended inquiries. Literacy is a hermeneutic platform which allows the literate person to actively seek and interpret information, engage in self-reflexive discovery, and communicate with others about this process.

Contrasting Royster's "literacy" keyword and rhetoric scholar Susan Kates's "rhetoric" keyword

provides insight into the values and practices motivating both projects. Kates writes,

I define rhetoric broadly to include education in speaking, reading, and writing, and I have chosen the term *rhetoric* over *composition* because of the former's historical association with philosophies of language. Because the educators in this study promoted courses in speaking, reading, and writing that asked students to examine the ideological implications of communication, I chose a term that is more indicative of a sophisticated interrogation of language and the curricular politics that inform the study of speaking, reading, and writing. (2)

Kates's reasons for privileging rhetoric as her keyword are very telling; she associates rhetoric with "philosophies of language" and with "sophisticated interrogation." Rhetoric is a prestige term in a way that composition and literacy are not, and its claims to prestige are bolstered by moves like Kates's here in which composition serves as rhetoric's degraded other. By underscoring these qualities of rhetoric in opposition to composition, Kates implies that composition is unconcerned with "the ideological implications of communication" and is unsophisticated in how it approaches language and "curricular politics." The complete absence of literacy here—its erasure as a keyword for describing reading and writing—is related to the diminishment of composition in this formulation. The impetus to distance rhetoric from composition emerges from the same source of disciplinary anxieties which made it necessary for Mountford to defend turning to literary examples. The rising visibility of rhetoric as a disciplinary keyword over the past decade relates to rhetoric's promise to shield composition from the disrespect we have too often perceived in our treatment from colleagues in literature and across the university. Rhetoric seems to give us gravitas; it certainly allows us to claim a much more ancient discipline than our literature brethren. Literacy is nowhere to be found in the dyad formed by Composition/Rhetoric (or Rhetoric/Composition—which order you choose functions as an inkblot test). If we embrace rhetoric because it offers prestige, literacy, a topic often written about by scholars in Education, drops to the wayside.

The privileging of rhetoric as a keyword manifests strangely at times by actively erasing literacy as a keyword. For instance, let's look at how Nan Johnson talks about Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream*. The following quotation is an excerpt from Johnson's book in which she discusses Royster's work:

In *Traces of a Stream*, Royster expresses an expansive insight into the diversity of rhetorical practices that efforts to remap the territory of the history of rhetoric can offer:

Ultimately, then, within a context of inhospitable circumstances, nineteenth-century African American women used language and literacy as a tool to authorize, entitle, and empower themselves; as an enabler for their own actions; and as a resource for influencing and inspiring others . . . [N]ineteenth-century African American women "read" and rewrote the world. They succeeded in developing a critical consciousness by which they envisioned their context, shaped their realities, and charted courses of action. They redefined their sphere of operation, imagining intersections for themselves among private, social, and public domains, and inventing ways to effect change using whatever platform was available to them. (234-35)

Although designed to define the particular parameters of African American women's rhetorical traditions, Royster's description of the rhetorical inventiveness of African American women also illustrates the kind of qualitative gain in historical insight into the range of what we can call *rhetorical* that feminist revisions of the rhetorical tradition have generated. (9)

Johnson erases any traces of literacy in her recapitulation of Royster's discussion of how nineteenth-century African American women "used language and literacy." Rhetoric is not a keyword for Royster in this excerpt, yet Johnson insists—four times—that Royster is describing rhetoric. Perhaps Royster's "language and literacy" may be understood as part of a "rhetorical tradition," but Johnson's willful blindness to Royster's actual keywords distorts one of the most important points Royster makes in this passage. When Royster says that nineteenth-century African American women "develop[ed] a critical consciousness by which they envisioned their context, shaped their realities, and charted courses of action" (235) she is speaking about how literacy activities foster critical consciousness or what Paulo Freire calls "*conscientização*," which describes a richer, more complex process than that implied by the English approximation of "consciousness-raising." For Freire, "*conscientização* represents the *development* of the awakening of critical awareness" (19). This critical awareness is the recognition of how an individual is constituted by culture and can himself actively shape culture and through this process reconstitute himself; this recognition which can only occur through praxis, the combined process of action and reflection (20). This is qualitatively different from what Johnson calls "rhetorical inventiveness," a frame which restricts Johnson's sight to how these women addressed others. Royster is talking both about how they addressed others and how they experienced and reshaped themselves as "people in the world" through literacy. This difference is significant and materially affects the questions posed by these scholars about history. For instance, Johnson poses these questions after her discussion about Royster: "How might we define rhetorical practices differently if we take the eloquence of women in its many forms into consideration? How might we define the rhetorical tradition differently when the roles of women in the history of rhetorical practices are taken into account?" (9). Contrast Johnson's questions with Royster's:

1. When we examine material conditions surrounding the acquisition of literacy by African American women, what do we notice about the impact of these factors on the choices they have made in using literacy?
2. How have these practices developed over time?
3. What is particular about this connection between writing and activism?
4. What have our analyses of African American women's writing, especially their essay writing, made in our understanding of language and literacy more generally in our understanding of the practices and achievements of this particular group? (25)

What I notice in comparing Johnson's and Royster's questions is the contrast between how the two scholars relate to their keyword. Rhetoric functions as an all-encompassing paradigm for Johnson and as a historian she is seeking to add to the paradigm by identifying unnoticed "forms" of "eloquence" and "rhetorical practices." Her questions prompt historians to supplement the exist-

ing “rhetorical tradition,” and through this supplementation, to expand the definition of what can be counted as belonging to “rhetoric.” Royster is similarly posing questions which would lead a historian to use the specific “language and literacy” practices of a particular group to conceptualize literacy itself. However, Royster is not contextualizing this inquiry within anything equivalent to the rhetorical tradition. Because literacy, unlike rhetoric, does not have an unified theoretical tradition consciously reinforced and reiterated over centuries, questions about literacy practices more freely assume that literacy as a concept is always understood as dependent on context. In other words, literacy-driven historians are not compelled to demonstrate how the practices they want to add to the tradition conform to the wisdom of ancient scholars. As a discipline, rhetoric is inherently conservative, actively conserving past practices, past knowledge, and insisting on the continuous application of these practices and knowledge in the present. In fact, this conservatism itself created the need for recovery efforts by rhetoric historians since this conservationist impulse creates a canon and builds a genealogy. Feminist historians of rhetoric have been grafting discarded branches back on the family tree of the rhetorical tradition.

So, why does it matter that Johnson translates Royster’s literacy into rhetoric, besides the fact that it is done quietly? As I read Royster, literacy is her keyword—although she also makes use of rhetoric—because it allows her to pay attention to women as essayists and the process of self-creation particularly supported by the essay. She says, “The essay as a generic form offers a unique opportunity to analyze how a writer foregrounds experiences, establishes a speaking self, and showcases a mind at work” (21). Royster describes the essay as multivocal and flexible. It is not merely an other-directed genre, but also self-directed. This is the key distinction. In practice, rhetoric allows us to see language acts as other-directed while literacy encourages us to consider how they are self-directed as well. The essayist uncovers herself to herself as she writes. In this way, the essay hosts what Michel Foucault calls a technology of the self. The act of writing occasions self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-correction, activities more visible when literacy and not rhetoric is our keyword.

As scholars we need to always be asking ourselves what the strengths and weaknesses of our keywords are. What do we gain, as historians, when we choose rhetoric or literacy as our keyword? How do these keywords make artifacts speak differently? As always, the importance of writing and reading histories are that they allow us to see ourselves through different eyes. From my review of contemporary Composition/Rhetoric histories I think we need to ask if the trends in the historical scholarship reflect trends in contemporary pedagogy. Are we privileging an audience-driven rhetorical approach over a self-exploratory literacy approach? How should we balance these competing visions? On another level, how are the material conditions of publication fostering certain keywords in scholarship? Finally, are we developing an orthodox approach to our own history that is making it harder for us to imagine what lingers just beyond our peripheral vision?

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A version of this essay was first presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Atlanta, Georgia, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> I specifically looked at: the keywords the writers used; the ways they defined keywords such as “rhetoric,” “composition,” and “literacy”; the materials they examined; and the scholars they cited. Here are the books that comprised this study: Lindal Buchanan’s *Regendering Delivery*; Carr, Carr, and Shultz’s *Archives of Instruction*; Donahue and Moon’s *Local Histories*; Enoch’s *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*; Gold’s *Rhetoric at the Margins*; Johnson’s *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910*; Kates’s *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937*; Logan’s *Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* and “We Are Coming”; Mattingly’s *Appropriate[ing] Dress*; Miller’s *The Evolution of College English*; Mountford’s *The Gendered Pulpit*; Robbins’s *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*; Royster’s *Traces of a Stream*; and Schultz’s *The Young Composers*.

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## On the Social Consequences of Literacy

Kate Vieira

I have sympathy for the bold, and currently unpopular, question that anthropologist Jack Goody and literary critic Ian Watt posed in 1963: What are the consequences of literacy? Goody and Watt argued that literacy's technical affordances allowed the objective recording of historical facts. Without the confusing subjectivity of face-to-face communication, culture could be passed on more or less accurately, distinguishing literate civilizations from oral ones. Writing within the contested field of anthropology from the 60s to the 80s, Goody feared cultural relativism had confused the bread and butter of anthropology, the study of "talking man," with the object of sociology, "reading and writing man" (Goody and Watt 304). Goody and Watt were trying to make some distinctions, based not on the newly politically embarrassing terms "primitive" and "civilized," but instead on concepts that were, in their view, less culturally biased but still worthy of attention: literate and nonliterate. They wanted to transcend the ethnocentrism that characterized nineteenth-century anthropology but were suspicious of what they called the "sentimental egalitarianism" that caused anthropologists to ignore crucial differences between civilizations (344).

The counterarguments to their claims are too numerous to rehearse here. Briefly, though, along with others, Brian Street (also an anthropologist) called attention to the variety of uses of literacy and orality in particular cultural contexts (namely Iran in the late 1970's, where he conducted fieldwork). To extrapolate about a society's capabilities from literacy's technical potential was, in Street's view, reductive, "technicist" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice*). For Goody and Watt, it was the central question of anthropology. In the ensuing decades, Goody qualified some of the terms of his argument and defended others. And scholars of New Literacy Studies, within and outside of anthropology, have produced careful studies of literacy's varied relationships to social contexts and to power. Literacy can index race, culture, age, gender, class, capitalism, identity; it leeches the meanings that organize our lives. In short, Goody and Watt's "autonomous" theory of literacy has been rebutted. And a scholarly field of inquiry has developed in its place.

Yet Goody and Watt's ambitious research question remains compelling: What are the consequences of literacy? I would like to know the answer. And I believe Composition Studies is an ideal disciplinary space from which to approach it. Some of us may make use of ethnographic methodologies, but we are not shackled to anthropological debates. Our unit of analysis is not culture, at least not centrally, but *writing*—how it happens, what it means, where it circulates, how it accomplishes its goals, whom it advances, whom it leaves behind, what it is worth and why. These processes entail the social, but do not require us to pin it down and watch it wriggle. Our attention can be more centrally trained on literacy.

There are consequences to literacy—large ones and, my own fieldwork suggests, often troubling ones. Can we explore them without dividing the world into oral and literate, without having to take

on debates that are not of our moment, and without sacrificing the crucial insights of New Literacy Studies? Are there new answers to old questions?

Brandt and Clinton, in an influential 2002 article, posed similar questions and answered affirmatively. They argued that literacy is not only a social product, but that it is also an object that actively constitutes the social. Seen in this Latourian vein, literacy's materiality is brought into bright relief. Viewed materially, literacy is a tool (though not a neutral one) that has particular potentials to be put to certain uses. This context-sensitive appeal to literacy's materiality avoids what Street condemns as "technicism" and also transcends what Brandt and Clinton term "the limits of the local." A focus on literacy's materiality is also timely: It resonates with contemporary scholarship on the affordances of new media (e.g. Haas; Kress) and of "old" media, such as paper (e.g. Hull; Kafka; Mortensen; Prendergast and Ličko). Brandt and Clinton encourage us to look *at* literacy instead of *through* it—precisely the work that compositionists' disciplinary training encourages, and perhaps a method of analysis that can yield new answers to questions that remain urgent.

What follows is a brief, and I hope suggestive, crack at such an analysis. My interests lie in the transnational, in the ways that literacy and people travel across borders, and in the ways that these trajectories are intertwined. Based on my recent ethnographic research with immigrant communities and their families, I am beginning to see literacy as a navigational technology that opens up some paths and closes off others, that orients and disorients, that routes and often reroutes.

## NAVIGATION

Here, then, are three attempts.

1. In my ongoing ethnography of a U.S. immigrant community, a young undocumented Brazilian man, Rafael, told me the following:

I'm in a public place, looking for something, or on the road, and I see a written sign in English, and I read it and manage to understand. . . this helps me when this happens. . .

And a similar excerpt: A middle aged Portuguese immigrant, Cristina, told me the following about her efforts to get to Boston to take the literacy test to get her citizenship papers:

I'm very smart, because if you give me an address to go to Boston or to go anywhere, I'll go. You gotta give me the address. You write it down. You say I want you to go to the city of Boston, take your citizen papers. I told the city hall, I told the lady, I've never been there, but if you write it to me, I'll believe it. . . . See, I know how to read, but not like you . . . That's why I lost [failed] three times on the citizen papers.

Here there is a curious connection between movement and literacy. Individual literacy allows Rafael and Cristina to orient themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, to read the world in a more literal sense than Freire had envisioned with his phrase. To chart a route to Boston on a map. To decipher a street sign in English through the windshield of a moving car. To go in a particular direction.

But Cristina's and Rafael's experiences suggest that literacy is not simply an

individual navigational skill. It is also an infrastructure that regulates movement. Cristina, having lived in the U.S. for 34 years, wanted to naturalize. Literacy, for her, is an *obstacle* to overcome as she seeks to write herself into the nation. Even worse, Rafael has no papers. He cannot legally drive or work: “I’d like a paper, to live here legally,” he told me. “Pretty soon they’ll prohibit us from walking.” The bureaucracy of immigration services has written him out. For Cristina and Rafael, literate infrastructures do not simply facilitate their movement. They also stall it.

The textual regulation of Cristina and Rafael is, to echo much work on literacy’s social history, a sign of history in the present. European nation-states came into being, in part, by wresting the authority to control people’s movement from religious institutions (Torpey). They consolidated their power in part through the passport—a textual apparatus that attempts to regulate the unwieldy movement of bodies. In our particular historical moment, many of these moving bodies are seen as problematically brown. Can migrants revise the narratives that write them in oppressive ways, as, for example, Morris Young’s or Juan Guerra’s or Tomás Mario Kalmar’s work suggests? Sometimes, yes. Literacy can sometimes empower, but often it oppresses, disenfranchises, regulates. These are some of its consequences.

2. If literacy regulates us, it also moves us. I am fascinated by pages 65 to 69 in Harvey Graff’s *Literacy Myth*. These pages offer evidence that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, migrants to Ontario were highly literate compared to others in their birthplaces. One scholar has suggested that migrants were recruited through personal letters sent from family members abroad (Foner). Through these letters, moreover, people were taught how to use the postal system (Gerber), a transnational literacy institution. This brings me briefly away from papers to our current moment of mass migration and digital writing technology. Is there a cross-border literacy pedagogy at work in these environments? I have recently been trying to answer this question by interviewing immigrants’ family members in Brazil, the ones who didn’t migrate, the ones who stayed home. They receive what I call “writing remittances”—the letters, emails, and computers that facilitate communication with their family members abroad. Writing remittances travel into their lives; and they participate in changing them.

Consider the experiences of two women I interviewed in a mid-sized town in Brazil: One woman, Maria, whose son migrated to Japan, was only able to complete the second grade and has difficulty writing and reading. She works as a domestic in other people’s houses. The other woman, Eliana, whose brother migrated to the U.S., completed a college degree in accounting. She worked as an accountant before her children were born and then worked at home raising them. While Maria is not impoverished, and Eliana is not extraordinarily wealthy, they represent opposite ends of Brazil’s entrenched class system.

But one social fact unites them: both women received computers from their family members abroad. Maria, with less formal education, can sign in, send photos, can Skype. Eliana, with more education, said that she only touches the computer to dust it. “I’m becoming illiterate,” she told me twice in the space of our 90-minute interview. Eliana, once an

accountant, cleans the computer sent from her brother in the U.S. In contrast, Maria, who cleans for a living, logs on. Writing technologies from abroad have facilitated a change in each woman's sense of her own literacy and of her social value. Their very places in the world seem to have shifted. They have been rerouted.

3. For many migrants, the goal is to get ahead, *ir para frente*, as Simone puts it to me, as we sip bottled water in her family's tidy kitchen. She is a college student, a Brazilian immigrant to the U.S., whose undocumented status has dogged her efforts to leverage education for upward mobility.

In the required course for her major, she encountered her toughest professor, who demanded essays that, in her words, one could not "B.S.":

If he doesn't see what he wants, or if he sees what he doesn't want, he'll take off points. . . . You write *na na na*, he will "minus 2." It has to be exactly what he wants.

Because of Simone's subordinate position as an undergraduate in an academic hierarchy, her words need to be corrected, deleted, revised or face the consequences ("minus 2"). This is a view of college writing as a checkpoint: "*Passei na marra*," Simone said of the required writing course, a phrase that roughly translates as "I passed by the sweat of my brow." She added, "But I passed. Everything turned out alright."

While writing to "pass" may be a common orientation to literacy among undergraduates, Simone's anxiety is accentuated by other moments in which she needed writing to pass, namely at points in her college education when her documents were demanded. Here she describes her anxiety about being able to complete a required internship for her major:

When classes finish, there is a day in your junior year. You make a line there, and everyone shows their ID. I showed my [Brazilian] passport to her. She said, "You have a passport. That's okay." And I was worried, not for the fact that I had a criminal record. I don't have anything, you know, but um, I don't know, you know. The check turned out okay, I don't know what. And then, there was another: the paper that was to apply, you had to put your social security number. So there was something else that I didn't have. So it was like that.

Simone's pressing textual anxieties seeped into her orientation to academic literacy. The punishing realities of her lived experiences with textuality could not be extricated from the literate site of the classroom, could not be extricated from her writing itself. To pass a college class, to pass a checkpoint, to pass for a white American—passing speaks to an assimilationist logic that continues to haunt U.S. literacy history.

New Literacy Studies scholars have demonstrated literacy's profound connection to social identities (e.g. Dyson; Gee; Heath; Royster; Sarroub), insights that we often put directly to use in the composition classroom. But understanding literacy materially, in the lives of undocumented migrants, shifts the focus from *identity* to *identification*. For many, writing becomes associated not centrally with expression or culture, but with a national tracking system that can lead to deportation, the separation of families, and sometimes death. Texts, in this context, are strong.

## STRONG TEXTS?

In *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, Goody argues that bureaucracies in the ancient near east depended on “the capacity for writing to communicate at a distance, to store information in files . . .” (89-90). The material affordances of particular kinds of literacies, in other words, buttressed ancient social institutions, including the post and the state. Such conclusions are specific to Goody’s field site, but they also resonate across contexts. It is remarkable, isn’t it, that writing’s roles in the ancient near east and in the contemporary migrant communities I have sketched here are so similar? Developing such comparisons may point another way forward for literacy studies. Researchers at the University of British Columbia, for example, are building a database that houses qualitative studies of literacy practices, so that scholars can work across grounded case studies to advance more robust theories (Purcell-Gates, Perry, and Briseño). To return to Goody, where he fails to persuade is in his distinctions between oral and literate societies. What is compelling about his work, and what helps me as I progress with my own, is not what orality supposedly cannot do, but what writing *can*.

To be clear: To track the consequences of literacies’ material affordances is not to uncritically rehabilitate strong text views of literacy, in which texts autonomously accomplish magnificent feats independent of the social. Instead, it is a radically social view of literacy—literacy understood from the perspective, in these cases, of migrants and their families—that brings me up against literacy’s consequences. When viewed from my field sites, the theoretical distinctions between strong text and context-sensitive theories of literacy begin to collapse. From this emic perspective, if nation states, with armies and laws, agree that papers have the power to regulate movement, then they do. Texts are as strong as the strongest make them. Sure, there are subversions and forgeries and creative misuses of literacy. But there is also mass compliance exacted through fear and through habit. For many participants in my research—and perhaps for others in highly bureaucratic societies—literacy is a potent object that enters their lives, that makes things happen.

No field site, of course, is representative. As I understand it, the value of ethnography as a methodology is in its specificity. Ethnographers attend to lived experiences and practices, and we proceed with the belief that such practices have something to teach our theories. What my research reveals is the entanglement of literacy with the movement of people—with their upward or downward social mobility and with their physical mobility across transnational borders or through hostile city streets. Literacy, experienced in these communities materially, is a navigational technology. It places and dis-places. It orients and disorients. It includes and it alienates. These are not metaphors for literacy. They are active verbs that correspond with the development of the nation state, the transnational post, and systems of social inequality. Literacy’s material affordances have social origins, yes. And they are taken up as part of other social practices, yes. That literacy is shaped by its social context has been irrefutably established. These claims lead us back, or perhaps forward, to its far-reaching consequences.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this article were first presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in St. Louis, MO, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Here is the relevant quote: “It has seemed worthwhile to enquire whether there may not be, even from the most empirical and relativist standpoint, genuine illumination to be derived from a further consideration of some of the historical and analytic problems connected with the traditional dichotomy between non-literate and literate societies” (305).

<sup>3</sup> See the introduction to *The Power of the Written Tradition*.

<sup>4</sup> In his 2003 response, Street argued that Brandt and Clinton risked making the global forces that acted on literacy seem “autonomous.” New Literacy Studies, he suggested, already had the conceptual heft to deal with the connection between the global and local through “literacy practices,” a category of analysis in which both local and global forces are visible.

<sup>5</sup> Historian Ben Kafka describes how a clerk rescued people from the Terror during the French Revolution by soaking lists of future victims in pails of water and dumping the pulp in nearby baths: “While everyone else was looking *through* the files for orders or for information, he looked *at* them, and recognized them for what they really were: ink and paper” (14).

<sup>6</sup> Young’s term for this is “minor revisions”; Guerra’s is “transcultural repositioning”; Kalmar’s research participants develop a subversive “wetback dictionary” to learn English on their own terms.

<sup>7</sup> In the early days of New Literacy Studies, Deborah Brandt popularized the term “strong text,” to represent what was wrong with previous theories: They were decontextualized and product-centered (*Literacy as Involvement*).

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## Babies and Bath Water

Kathryn Flannery

[I]t may be hypothesized that examination of the contexts and uses of literacy in communities today may show that *there are more literacy events which call for appropriate knowledge of forms and uses of speech events than there are actual occasions for extended reading and writing.*

—Shirley Brice Heath, “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events” (351 original emphasis)

We had just begun our discussion of Shirley Brice Heath’s “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events” in my upper division Uses of Literacy course when a conscientious and eager sophomore, Sarah, asked what Heath meant by “extended reading and writing.” Sarah, who is planning to be a high school teacher, was trying to figure out the distinction Heath seems to be making between everyday literacies and schooled literacies. We had already read Brian Street’s critique of the so-called “essay-text” tradition, so we were not coming to Heath cold (Street 116). Class members had also noticed as they kept their daily literacy logs that in their ordinary lives they engaged in reading and writing of many forms and uses. Perhaps “back then,” Sarah surmised, when Heath was writing in the 1980s, students in high school and college were actually engaged in something like extended—by which Sarah meant longer, more demanding—reading and writing. But Sarah was disappointed to find that relatively little was expected of her in school: she had written very little in high school and not much more in college; and reading seemed only supplementary to class lectures with college instructors often supplying, electronically or on paper, what she referred to as “note sheets” outlining the lecture or simplifying information from textbooks. Other students entered into the conversation, adding their own experiences. A few students had composed honors theses in high school and some had been assigned research papers in college History or English classes, but for the most part these students, ranging from sophomores to fifth-year seniors, recalled little that they would call “extended” literacy whether in discussion-size classes or large lectures. Outside of school, a few wrote poetry, song lyrics, or short fiction on their own; and a few characterized themselves as avid readers, reading for pleasure or inspiration across a range of genres. But for the most part students reported having had little experience, in school or out, with reading and writing that they thought required deep thought or concentration, time or challenge. Not all students shared Sarah’s sense of regret, however. An older returning student, Sam, suggested that perhaps Street’s critique had actually had some effect, to the extent that schooled literacy had “evolved” to be much like everyday literacy, characterized as he put it by short bits of text to read or to write. As they discovered in keeping their literacy logs, the most frequent action taken throughout the day was not extensive reading or writing, but “checking” and “scanning.” But, is it such a bad thing, Sam asked, if

what we do in school is more like the “real world”?

As I reflect on this class discussion and others like it, a number of questions arise. What is it that Sarah thinks she is missing? Of what value is extended reading and writing, however we might define those terms? What kinds of knowledges or know-how can we reasonably expect from extended reading and writing? Whether or not “real world” literacy involves primarily reading and writing short bits of text (through whatever modalities), to what extent should schools and universities shape curriculum to mirror the “real world” and whose “real world” gets to count? Much research in Literacy Studies has suggested that schools need to be more permeable to the larger community. But for such permeability to be productive, we would have to pay attention, in Heath’s terms, to the specificity of concrete contexts in which reading and writing take place in order to better understand the personal and communal values and purposes of different kinds of practices. In the early 1980s, Heath was contesting what she saw as the dominant “dichotomous view of oral and literate traditions” (348). Her ethnography of communities in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas—the basis for her groundbreaking *Ways with Words*—led her to suggest that the presumed distinction between oral and literate groups might not in fact accurately describe the communicative practices evident in many communities in the United States. Her work contributed to a larger critique of those dominant notions of literacy that not only privilege so-called literate cultures over so-called oral cultures, but that privilege academic forms and practices over all others. Heath emphasizes the importance of knowing “what the framing situations for literacy events are in a variety of contexts” because they may differ significantly, and “in fact, contradict such traditional expectations of literacy as those taught in school or in job training programs” (351). This is a core idea that has generated much important work in Literacy Studies: traditional school-based literacies are not necessarily required on the job, in our personal lives, or in the day-to-day workings of the world. They do not, in and of themselves, guarantee economic success, moral superiority, or personal happiness. To take such school-based literacy as the measure of all literacies may thus blind us to the greater variety of literacy practices in the world—including the extent to which literacy and orality are intertwined—and to the greater capacity of ordinary people to engage in a variety of literacy events. The implications for both schooling and job training are significant. If, as in Heath’s study, we notice the differing ways children engage in literacy practices outside of school, we might design our curriculum to build on what they already know how to do rather than presume cognitive deficits. A greater number of children might then succeed in school such that they would have more, rather than fewer, options in life. If, as in Sheryl Gowen’s study of hospital workers, we appreciate the extent to which the janitor is already engaged successfully in a range of literacy practices (and in multiple modalities) outside of the workplace, we might design a job training program that starts with what he already knows how to do and, from there, build knowledges and skills not only actually useful for his present job, but potentially allowing him to move to a better job.

In neither case, however, is it presumed that what one does in school should be narrowly vocational or reductively skills-oriented or that it should merely replicate the literacies already available in the community. Heath does not argue that the literacies available to children in the communities she studies—whether working class or middle class, whether white or black—are sufficient in them-

selves for the changing world in which they live. Gowen values the knowledges and the know-how the janitor makes use of as an active member of his church, but she does not assume those literacies are by themselves sufficient for him to advance on the job. In both cases, the literacies are shown to be specific to contexts even as they are powerful indicators of the capacity to learn more, to increase one's repertoire, to increase one's mobility between and among differing contexts.

If Literacy Studies thus provides Sam some support for his thinking, it also provides some support for Sarah's worry. Literacy Studies makes clear that everyday literacies are not necessarily "lesser"—they can enable us to perform all kinds of functions in our lives—but Literacy Studies also makes clear that everyday literacies may not be enough, and in some cases may be limiting or downright dysfunctional. In their very useful review of research concerning literacy and learning outside of school, Glynda Hull and Katherine Schultz do not doubt the value of "document[ing] and validat[ing] the plethora of personal and local literacy practices;" but, as important as that work continues to be, they urge that we "should not abandon the opportunities that school historically has provided to develop particular forms of text-based expertise, forms that provide a power absent in many everyday literacies" (602). Although they emphasize the value of schooling that "prepare[s] students for professional lives in which the mastery of written genres is central" (601), Hull and Schultz want to consider broader purposes beyond the narrowly vocational. They thus ask, "what forms of schooled literacy are powerful intellectual tools appropriate for these new times, and what forms are mere conventions or historical artifacts?" (602).

I take this to be a live, rather than merely rhetorical, question. Hull and Schultz do not assume that conventionalized forms with long histories *cannot* serve as powerful intellectual tools. They suggest, for example, that "essayist texts" might be valuable in part because they contrast with the short bits that "make up much everyday reading and writing in terms of form and purpose" (602). The phrase "essayist texts" in Literacy Studies has tended to serve as a placeholder for something like "academic writing," not one form but a polymorphous set of forms and practices. Although the phrase is sometimes taken to refer only to "essays" (as something like the equivalent to the critique of the five-paragraph theme in Composition Studies), Hull and Schultz offer a more capacious understanding that encompasses not only essays (an already protean category), but forms of imaginative writing as well. The problem with "essayist texts" comes not with a form or set of forms *per se*, however, but with the tendency to treat these forms or practices as valuable in and of themselves, independent of their history of use, as if—in Brian Street's strong form of the critique—such literacy was a neutral, rather than "culture-specific," practice (116). That particular forms or practices come with historical—or culture-specific—baggage does not immediately disqualify them for use in the present, however. It is not news to say that the master's tools have been used against him.

Hull and Schultz's question, then, might need to be refined: we need to ask not simply what forms of schooled literacy are powerful intellectual tools, but under what circumstances can forms and practices of literacy serve as powerful tools, how can they be taken up, appropriated or adapted for powerful use? Hull and Schultz foreground "length" as a distinguishing factor. Length alone, of course, is not sufficient, but one can imagine that length—as Sarah put it in our class discussion—can give one space and time to pursue a complex question or problem more deeply. That academic writ-

ing “contrasts sharply” with typical forms in the everyday—Hull and Schultz mention “lists, letters, notes, advertisements” as examples of the everyday—can open up room for critical distance (602). In this sense, “contrast” may be necessary to defamiliarize routinized practices (whether routinized in school or out) (602). But perhaps most important is purpose.

Some of my students’ analyses of key literacy events in their lives attest to traditional forms of reading and writing that have mattered to them as individuals and members of communities. The purposes they bring to “essayist texts” or that they discover through reading and writing do not simply replicate the purposes the institution, the curriculum, or their teachers necessarily have in mind. For some students, traditional literacy practices connect them to the past, to their families or longer traditions in powerful ways. Joseph first learned to pray by rote in Hebrew School, without fully understanding, but he came to value this ancient practice because it connects him to his father, his grandfathers, on back through multiple generations. This connectedness fuels his desire to study Hebrew, not for his job but for his life. After Emily read “all of!” Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, she wrote a paper on what she thought was Darwin’s “reverence” for the natural world, a reverence that allowed her to be in conversation with a book she had been taught to see as opposed to everything her religion held sacred. She was proud of the fact that she now had an independent view and could now hold her own in a dinner table conversation with her uncle who first encouraged her to go to a secular college (against her parents’ objections). Other students have deployed “academic writing” to get a stronger hold on forms of discourse from the world of work or from their everyday lives; and still others have achieved some critical traction with everyday forms that at first seemed unalterable. Adam, an older returning student who never thought he was a “good writer” and never thought he would need to write much of anything in his adult life, nonetheless found himself in a job that required composing technical reports for which his schooling had not prepared him. He was surprised to find that his technical expertise actually enabled him to improve on boilerplate formats he was expected to use, and in the process he discovered that he is, as he put it, more than just a “robot” filling in the blanks.

Here are a range of purposes—not manufactured by a curriculum or necessarily even anticipated by teachers—representing ways students have put forms of schooled literacies to use. But what about Sarah and the increasingly greater number of students who report that they have not had such opportunities for purposeful engagement in extended reading and writing, in school or out? Composition cannot by itself insure that students will have the time and space to try out a range of intellectual tools, to weigh the conventions, to put academic forms in relation to the literacies of the everyday in order to interrogate both. The university as a whole has that responsibility. But Composition Studies has historically attempted both to critique institutionalized practices and also to show how and in what ways those practices have value for students personally and professionally, and for the larger community. Composition Studies, in this sense, has been invested, from the outset, in keeping the university permeable to the outside. It may be, however, that sometimes in our efforts to insure that the everyday gets a fair hearing, we have risked losing the power of difference, the power of contrast, the power of academic literacies in relation to the everyday. We are at our best, I would say, when we resist romanticizing either everyday literacies or schooled literacies. And we are most honest when we recognize the potential power in the intellectual tools we ourselves have

used to mount critiques of the academy and of the larger culture. Especially in our increasingly less mobile society, it is all the more important—in a Gramscian sense—to insure that all students have access to a range of literacies that they can take up and redeploy in ways beyond their own or our own imaginings. To presume that only certain kinds of students will “need” or can effectively make use of extended reading and writing is to risk rigidifying social and political stratifications already too much in place.

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## Symposium Comments

Brian V. Street

Bringing together Literacy Studies and Composition Studies is quite a major enterprise, involving crossing over borders between nations (especially but not only UK and USA), and fields such as New Literacy Studies (see Gee, “The New” and *Social*; Street, “The New”) along with Composition, Rhetoric, EAP and other acronyms. The contributors to the opening volume of this pathbreaking journal all take on some of the tensions and challenges such crossing poses.

A starting point, that all refer to in one way or another, is the contested meanings of “new” in the accounts of New Literacy Studies (NLS) and new approaches to rhetoric. For some, the epithet “new” in NLS refers to “new literacies,” such as the everyday digital literacies that students are likely to have encountered, perhaps more than their tutors. For others what is “new” in NLS is, in fact, the “Studies”—that is, it is the approaches to the study of literacy that are new and that we have to confront as we engage with the writing currently required of students—and of faculty—in higher education (HE). If we take the first definition, then the work of tutors is seen as particularly to attempt to link the literacy experience of their students, in digital, internet, and new media environments, with that of the literacy required in their academic disciplinary contexts. If we take the second meaning, however, then the tutors’ problems are of a more epistemological and methodological kind—rather than worrying how student writing of essays can link with student experience of internet texting, for instance, their concern is to conceptualise—or to re-conceptualise—what are the bases for learning, doing and evaluating writing in these contexts.

It is here that a further mediating field enters, that of “academic literacies” (ACLITS), acknowledged by most of the commentators here as somehow mediating the space between traditional Composition views of writing and the “new” approaches to literacy as social practice, in and out of the academy, represented by NLS. But, as Horner points out amongst others, there are problems with this mediation. On the one hand, it might lead tutors at university to believe they should privilege the home literacies of their students, leading to a kind of relativism that leaves us uncertain what actually counts in particular contexts, a concern also expressed by Graff in his concern with the “anything goes” perspective. And on the other hand, it might lead to the mistaken assumption that we can define new, plural forms of academic literacy whilst in fact maintaining the old autonomous model view of hierarchy and privilege that the participants thought they were opposing. Vieira, similarly, worries that the “NLS” perspective could lead researchers to reject the findings of work such as hers with migrants in which it became clear that literacy was being used by State institutions in order to privilege certain forms of language and culture. In such contexts, the ideological model in fact

remains latent, even when tutors have apparently adjusted to the “new” demands of the worlds in which their students live. Horner cites Bourdieu here to help us understand how we might all be subject to such pressures beneath the surface, without necessarily realising that we are.

How, then, to avoid these traps, what Bourdieu refers to as “dispositions which are impalpably inculcated?” And how might such new thinking help us to address issues in Composition Studies and not only those in Social Literacies more generally? That, in a way, is exactly the agenda of this new journal—the answers aren’t simple, if they were we wouldn’t need such a rich and complex new literacy activity. But, in anticipation of some of the papers to come, I would like to suggest some ways in which we can begin to address the issues raised by the first commentators.

My first position would be to reinforce the theoretical and methodological approach represented by NLS. Taking literacy as social practice and resisting the disposition toward an autonomous model, can have significant consequences for our work in the Academy, as we support students in their writing and indeed extend and adjust our own writings (see Lillis and Curry). Recognising that such practices are themselves social does not mean, as Horner fears, thereby taking on any “social” practice of literacy—there are of course context specific features to writing in the Academy, as in other contexts, even whilst these can also be defined as “social.” But frequently these features may remain “hidden.”

And here is another perspective I would like to suggest. Working with a group of doctoral students at the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, we came to realise that, even at this stage of their career, they were being told that they needed to “learn how to write,” or at least to write for doctoral purposes. But for many of them the advice they had received when drafting texts had remained mainly formal and linguistic/ grammatical whilst when they received feedback on their actual writing it seemed that other features figured that had not been signaled explicitly. We came to refer to these as “hidden” features and we compiled a list (Street, “Hidden”) which, whilst not exhaustive, points towards the ongoing problems students may face even at this level—and indeed, that experienced faculty and researchers also face when they submit articles for publication (see Hasrati; Lillis and Curry).

Finally I would like to signal some work that has already gone on in bringing the traditions of Social Literacies and College Composition together. A SIGET IV panel (2007 in Brazil) on “genre in academic literacies” and the Writing across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines (WAC/WID) conferences in recent years have set rolling a discussion of the similarities and differences in the two traditions. A paper by Russell et al. arising from the 2007 conference, and involving authors from both traditions who have worked across the national boundaries, maps out some elements of each in relation to the other, which they hoped would set in train further discussions and cross-fertilization, of the kind now indicated by *Literacy in Composition Studies* (LiCS). The authors recognized the historical movements involved, with WAC/WID, originating in the US in the early 1970s and, with ACLITS, originating in England in the early 1990s. As they acknowledge, “Both ACLITS and WAC took their impetus from widening participation, as it is called in the UK, or admission of previously



excluded groups in the US" (396). It is the continuing widening of participation in higher education in both countries and indeed in others where colleagues are watching these responses with interest that mainly set the scene for this continuing discussion in *LiCS*. Russell et al. marked down some of the themes that will need to be pursued. They point out, for instance, that although "both ACLITS and WAC treat genre in social and cultural terms, there are fundamental differences in approaches to and development of genre theory, research, and pedagogy, which deserve fuller exposition and continuing mutual reading of each others' work and dialog on it" (417). And they point to key concepts that will continue to be significant in the forthcoming debates, discussing for instance how each tradition takes account of genre pedagogically—the relationship between genre and learning to write, on one hand, and genre and writing to learn, on the other.

It is the exploration and development of such key themes in the fields that I anticipate will be the major focus and contribution of *LiCS* in the coming years and I look forward eagerly to the forthcoming volumes.

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## Beginnings of a Polemic: Shaking the Borders of a Literate Education

Steve Parks

The essays in this symposium represent an extended reflection on how “literacy” might inform our work as composition scholars and teachers. While all the essays are provocative for how they position the possibilities of a sustained engagement by composition with literacy studies, I have found myself repeatedly returning to the work of Kathryn Flannery and Bruce Horner. I believe their essays offer our field a sense of how to move beyond some of the limitations of our most recent “public turn” and towards a pedagogical practice that better meets the goals of our composition classrooms and community partners.

Of course, the most recent “public turn” of the past fifteen years could be seen as a “re-turn” to a set of public commitments that announced themselves to the field most recently during the 1960s and 1970s, a period when fundamental aspects of the national political contract were being re-negotiated. In large part due to the activist work by the Black Caucus, the Latino Caucus, and other activist organizations, our national organization, CCCC, began to recast its relationship to the larger public, moving its axis from one of Cold War nationalism to a more contentious and ambivalent relationship to the public sphere (Blackmon, Kirklighter, and Parks; Davis; National Council). Within this space, new arguments were put in place about the value of the existing literacies of our students as well as what it might mean to make a public commitment to such literacies (Fleming), *The Students’ Right To Their Own Language* being a culminating point of such arguments.

The conservative restoration of the 1980’s (both politically and pedagogically) reduced this dynamic vision of composition to “literacy as identity politics,” a move premised on essentializing the identities of non-traditional students into simple tropes. In such a classroom, students were asked to turn historically-in-flux heritages into static qualities that could be stitched together under a “progressive” vision of academic literacy (Horner). Students learned tolerance, but not an enriched vision of how identities are a resting point in an endless negotiation of the current moment, a moment always occurring within a historically complex landscape. During this period, the borders between individuals, heritages, classrooms, and community were being fortified instead of explored.

Today, the “Public Turn” has come to stand for the development of community partnerships, a series of local efforts designed to reinvigorate the dynamic relationship between composition and the community, the classroom and the civic. These new commitments often characterize local literacies as if they were unique and complete systems, often quantifiable and limited in scope (Flower). In this way, as Horner correctly argues, the most recent “Public Turn” has not developed a framework which moves beyond a sense of autonomous literacy, where such literacy is seen as outside of time and place, representing a unique set of cognitive and writerly values. Within this model, each newly dis-

covered local literacy practice is also understood as “autonomous.” The literacy pantheon expands, but the analysis of each literacy remains locked within a limited theoretical model.

The danger in such a position, again echoing Horner, is that students engaged in community projects framed under this rubric learn a static sense of literacy. Rather than see any/all communities as being an ecological system of diverse literate moves, occurring across, within, and beyond shifting boundaries, students learn a fixed (and simultaneous) non-historical sense of how literacy operates in a local context. It is the equivalent of taking one literacy practice out of Cushman’s richly articulated community analysis in *The Struggle and the Tools*, separating it from its complex environment, then claiming to understand the literacy practices of a community. Clearly a different model is required.

Instead of thinking in terms of “distinct” literacies, our pedagogical goal within community partnerships should be to understand how any one “literate” moment is a resting point within a dynamic relationship between a series of diffuse literacy practices. The point is to study the *process* by which such resting places occur. Having done so, the work should then be to develop strategies that enable students and community members to negotiate amongst these multiple practices as a means to produce a more ethical and equitable literacy system.

Our classrooms, as Flannery reminds us, might still hold the promise of providing such an education to our students and, I would add, support to our local communities. Her essay reflects upon another aspect of the “public turn”—a tendency to frame “public literacies” as equal in status to “academic literacies.” While the intent of such a framing is clearly on solid political grounds, the utility of such a move is clearly questionable. Flannery asks us to consider the types of work different literacies enable and then to consider how they might join in common effort. For instance, how might the research work made possible by an academic essay be seen in alliance with the rhetorical work of a community organizer’s speech? What impact might such an alliance produce? To be effective community partners, that is, students need to understand the complex interplay made possible through the ability to shift between these different literacies, assessing their strengths, and pointing them towards a common endpoint. This could be the “literacy” work of our classrooms.

Taken collectively, then, Horner and Flannery enable us to reimagine the composition classroom as a site where our students work with the broader community to enact new collaborative literacy strategies designed to foster a greater collective good. This engagement of our students in such renegotiation, this placing them in the field of such activity, should be the work of the “public turn.” Of course doing so would necessarily also require teaching our students the skills of community organizing. For changing what counts as accepted literacy practices also means changing power structures. But, clearly, that is the topic for another essay.

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## Moving Beyond Place in Discussions of Literacy

Jennifer Seibel Trainor

In Kathryn Flannery's contribution to this volume, she cautions readers against romanticizing non-school literacies as more authentic and valuable than essayist, school-based textual practices. Although it is important to document and validate everyday literacies, she writes, Flannery draws on Hull and Schultz to reiterate that we should not "abandon the opportunities that school historically has provided to develop particular forms of text-based expertise, forms that provide a power absent in many everyday literacies"(qtd. in Flannery). Composition is at its best, Flannery concludes, when we "recognize the potential power in the intellectual tools we ourselves" use. Bruce Horner makes a similar point in his contribution to this volume: we have made a fetish, he writes, of what dominant ideology leads us to recognize as "the new" as a means of accomplishing social change. We assume that changing our focus to new, non-school literacies will somehow solve the problems inherent in more autonomous models of literacy. But fetishizing non-school literacies does not actually challenge the power of school forms; fetishizing creates a dichotomy that only reinforces the original hierarchy.

The school/non-school dichotomy that Flannery and Horner critique has, for all its problems, been a productive one in Composition. In my own teaching, it has prompted illuminating class discussions about the kinds of writing students do outside of school. These discussions reveal, among other things, that students have their own romantic notions of non-school literacies. In their discussions of the writing they do outside of school, the students describe writing as "free," "creative," and "authentic." In describing the writing they do in school, they talk about losing their own voice, focusing only on what the teacher wants to hear, trying to follow "pointless" rules and formulas. Beyond the classroom, the school/non-school dichotomy has prompted important discussions in our scholarship about the purpose of Composition: to what extent does the teaching of essayist texts help our students accomplish writing tasks in other aspects of their lives? Is there any reason to teach the "mutt genres" of school-based literacy? Can we teach writing outside of the specific contexts that call for writing? (See Downs and Wardle; Smit; Wardle.)

In response to my students and to these questions, I've designed many a curricular intervention aimed at bringing the seeming energy and authenticity of my students' non-school writing to the classroom. I'll say more about these efforts in a moment. But as productive as the dichotomy has been, Horner and Flannery ask us to question the school/non-school divide, and to think about not just what it reveals, but what it obscures. How can we learn to view literacy *in* composition, as the title of this journal suggests, and not something that takes place, exotically or authentically, outside it? Are there metaphors or lenses that can help us see the dichotomy differently? Flannery suggests that we need to view literacy not in terms of whether or not it is school-based, but rather in terms of purpose. Drawing on rich examples from her own students, Flannery shows how a focus on purpose

illuminates aspects of our students' literate lives that remain unseen within the familiar dichotomy of school v. non-school literacies. For Flannery's students, school-based genres and conventions are transformed by the students' idiosyncratic purposes in adopting them: "the purposes [students] bring to 'essayist texts' or that they discover through reading and writing do not simply replicate the purposes the institution, the curriculum, or their teacher necessarily have in mind." She cites a provocative example: a student, asked to write a research paper on Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, finds a way to connect Darwin to her own Christian views, transforming both in the process.

Horner similarly advocates a shift in perspective as a way to escape dichotomies that reify literacies. Rather than viewing literacies in terms of their spatial location (taking place in school or outside of it), he suggests we view literacies in terms of temporality. Quoting Raymond Williams, Horner argues that spatial metaphors lead to static conceptualizations of literate texts and practices. These metaphors help "build and reify a great divide between in school and out of school" literacies. Understanding literacy in terms of the temporal, in contrast, emphasizes literacy as an activity that occurs in time. This lens brings into sharper focus the ways that all literacies morph, shift, appropriate, hybridize, and change as they are deployed by individuals and groups.

I'm intrigued by these perspectives. For all that I've been guilty myself, sometimes along with my students, of romanticizing the authentic, voice-filled writing they do outside of school, and for all that I and my students have chafed against the seeming rigidity imposed on them by school forms, when I look at the work students produce when liberated from the necessity of "following the rules," I'm never quite satisfied, and interestingly, neither are they, though they struggle to put into words precisely what they feel is missing from their writing. Two semesters ago, I asked the students to create blogs. They were given freedom to determine the topic, the genre, the design, and the voice of their blogs. One student chose to write about "the importance of courtly, gentlemanly values." His blog, at first, read like a men's magazine, with posts about how to treat women and how to dress like a gentleman. His classmates were not impressed. Some raised issues with the sexism implicit in his stance. Others felt he was simplifying the idea of "gentlemanly." I tended to agree with the students. I found the stance the student had taken to be problematic in the gender issues it raised but didn't address, and overly simplistic in its call to return to the past when "men knew how to be men." With some guidance from a skilled TA working with me that semester, the student wrote a post connecting ideas about gentlemanly behavior to his identity as a Latino. He began to read about the DIY movement on the Internet and found that the ideas behind this movement were similar to feelings he had about what it meant to be a man. Using a timeless academic form—the compare/contrast essay—he wrote two posts comparing his ideas about gentlemanly behavior and the DIY movement. Using academic research tools, he incorporated texts about identity into his writing about his own identity as a Latino.

All of this is to say that his original writing—liberated from school forms—was not any more authentic to what he was trying to say than his later, more school-based writing was. In fact, I'm sure he would say that it was only when he began to use the tools of the academy that he was really able to enact the purposes and express the ideas he began with. Reflecting on his blog at the end of the semester, the student commented that his blog writing "is me in the future—the voice—it's who I'm

going to be when I'm a professional." For this student, his voice was not determined by place but by his sense of his identity as it changed and will change over time. Horner's and Flannery's call to resist the temptations of dichotomous thinking about where literacy takes place provides an important lens through which to see the complexity of the literate work our students, like this one, do in our courses.

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## Writing a Self In/Outside School

Mary Soliday

In ninth grade, my son became absorbed in writing a persuasive political essay. To write it, he drew knowledge from his considerable everyday literacy practice—blogs, polls, YouTube, Wikipedia, and a political forum he has managed for years. As Kathryn Flannery astutely observes in her contribution to this symposium, students’ purposes for writing are often “not manufactured by a curriculum or necessarily even anticipated by teachers.” Similarly, in this case, my son created his purpose by relating his everyday practice to the requirements of the assignment.

To use the terms of New Literacy scholar Roz Ivanič, my son affiliated his autobiographical self with this act of authorship. That affiliation lies at the heart of how writers construct complex aspects of the self through discourse. Ivanič proposes three overlapping aspects of the self, all concerned with a writer’s voice. The writer’s *autobiographical self* draws resources from a life-history—experiences, ideas, commitments, and a personal bank of literacy practices—at a moment in time (328). Especially salient in a school context, the *self as author* involves the writer’s stance, and claims to speak (26). The *discoursal self* concerns “the sense of the way [writers] want to sound” (25), and it also signals the degree to which a writer owns, or disowns, a text (221-21).

My colleague Tara Lockhart and I find, in our research at San Francisco State, that undergraduates believe they grow as writers when they can relate aspects of the autobiographical self to their schooled authorship. We’ve interviewed 70 students so far, and collected writing from 22. Here are two examples from our research of students who encountered what Flannery, citing Shirley Brice Heath, calls the “extended reading and writing” practice typical of academic life.

*Adrian* is a chemistry major who does not believe he learned anything useful from university English classes, where, he said, he was “always” “challenged” to make his papers “long enough,” largely because he was not “interested” in humanistic topics. But in his writing intensive chemistry course, where he had plenty to say, Adrian struggled to make his papers “shorter.” In chemistry, Adrian attended research seminars and wrote reviews about knowledge that “is being used today”; these reviews paved the way for his robust research proposal on how drug transport vehicles could cure kidney cancer. When he imagined how he sounded in his papers, Adrian pictured himself “sitting” and “looking” at the English teacher, wondering what he should write, whereas in chemistry, he pictured himself “talking” “like a narrator” “to a roomful of chemists.”

By contrast, *Cassandra*, a nursing major, passionately affiliated herself with the extensive literacy practices of English class. These essays from English class “challenged” her to “figure out what kind of writer I was.” She felt “connected” “to every single one [she] wrote.” Cassandra invested herself intellectually and emotionally in her writing group, where she experimented with deep revision and “creative” sentence style, emulating authors such as Azar Nafisi. However, Cassandra reported that



her writing intensive course in nursing “was a hard transition,” saying that she felt that the research paper on anti-biotic resistance she wrote “is not me.” The topic excited her but Cassandra felt her instructor forced her to write a specialized analysis of research articles, which also meant she had to narrow the topic to anti-biotic resistance in cancer patients. She had hoped, though, to address her future patients on the perils of overusing antibiotics in their everyday lives. Cassandra disowned her research paper, despite the high grade, because she felt she wrote only for “the teacher.”

Flannery writes, “sometimes in our efforts to ensure that the everyday gets a fair hearing, we have risked losing the power of difference, the power of contrast, the power of academic literacies in relation to the everyday.” For students like Adrian or Cassandra (or my son), this “power of academic literacies in relation to the everyday” is not felt often enough. How can we cultivate the relationship?

Adrian connected his autobiographical self to authorship in an exciting class that was, to cite Flannery, “permeable to the outside.” Adrian attended conferences, and his professor encouraged his students to act as contributors and to tackle big human problems. Cassandra’s composition class, where she claimed ownership over her writing process, was also “permeable” in the sense that students developed relationships with readers other than the teacher. For both students, then, it was not the extended nature of the practice that mattered but, as Flannery suggests, the purpose. These writers experienced meaningful literate moments in classes that had “permeable” qualities: classes that drew energy from the outside world and that supported a rich and interactive composing process.

What Literacy Studies shows Composition Studies is not that we shouldn’t teach traditional literacy because, as Flannery indicates, school genres may offer access to powerful intellectual tools. Instead, we must attend to a more difficult—and often quite subtle—task: imagining the bridge between everyday and academic literacy practices. To imagine it, we must, as Flannery suggests, attend closely to the “ways students have put forms of schooled literacies to use.” Perhaps, too, we can observe what our colleagues do across the disciplines, and work harder than we have to create more “permeable” classes where our students can inflect genres with their own purposes.

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## After Words: Some Thoughts

Donna Qualley

I am struck by Kate Vieira's observation about "the entanglement of literacy with the movement of people." Movement always entails some kind of change (temporary or permanent) in location or perspective. Both literacy and composition studies are sites that are concerned with people's movements within and between places, contexts, and discourses. Vieira, of course, is focusing on the material experience of people and the literacy forms, technologies and infrastructures that enable, restrict, or complicate their physical and social passage through space and time. While a move may or may not always entail a change in physical or material location, it can certainly involve conceptual shifts in perspective. Scholars in both fields attend to the language, practices and technologies that individuals use to navigate their movements and that others use to regulate these movements, often at points of critical transition.

I am thinking about the human physics of such movements. Newton tells us that the body at rest stays at rest. And, unless acted upon by some outside force (or prompted by some exigence), the body in motion will resist speeding up, slowing down, or changing direction. Of course, human beings are subjects, not objects. They have volition, will, and desire that can shape and impact their trajectories. Unlike objects, subjects have at least partial navigational control of their speed, velocity, and pace of acceleration/de-acceleration in response to the multitude of forces—political, institutional, economic, cultural, and social—that surround them. How can we describe the directions, rhythms, and pace of these movements? What factors influence whether individuals go-with-the-flow, push back, speed up, slow down, idle, stall, retreat, or change direction? The questions concern me as a teacher. I notice when the degree of displacement that results in a slight change of position is not indicative of the amount of energy expended or the actual distance a student has traveled. The metaphor of movement reminds us, as Bruce Horner notes, that literacy has both spatial and temporal qualities.

In "Ideologies of Literacy," Horner argues that merely extending the range of literacy forms, practices, technologies that we teach or sanction is not likely to result in significant change. Little conceptual movement occurs when the ideological frameworks from our original practices and locations are left intact. But deeply ingrained ideologies are difficult to budge, despite the public's fear to the contrary. Rather than changing the ways people think or read or write (or teach), Horner's essay reminds me that these new texts, practices, and technologies probably aren't changing them enough—at least in the educational sphere. We only need recollect how writing process never really resulted in the promised paradigm shift for the field, nor did it always result in significant changes in pedagogy. (In fact, writing process could be a case study for the limitations of low-road transfer.)

The terms and theories that we continue to use (or that continue to use us) can also cause a kind of mental inertia when they cease to become troublesome. When our terms and concepts no longer function as threshold concepts, portals that enable further movement, they may keep us place

bound. How do our key words navigate and direct our thinking? Brenda Glascott's discussion reveals some of the ways in which the key terms of literacy and rhetoric frame the kinds of questions that we ask, the artifacts we study, and the methodologies we employ. We have many examples of literacy ethnographies because, as Glascott notes, literacy is difficult to disentangle from its contexts. And yet literacy also lends itself to interdisciplinary meandering in ways that rhetoric does not. Perhaps this is because, as Glascott notes, rhetoric has a more theoretically unified (and resistant?) tradition that serves a more conserving function.

Whether our orienting key term is rhetoric or literacy may also be a function of the time and place of our initial "in-doctor-ination." I have an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in composition, literacy, and learning (a program that no longer exists today at the University of New Hampshire where I studied). Although I probably was attracted to this graduate program because of the range of movement it afforded me, I suspect that the emphasis on making interdisciplinary connections in literacy helped keep my compositional key terms from becoming fixed and from fixing me squarely in one place. Cultivating an interdisciplinary perspective can engender a meta-awareness that thwarts our disciplinary assumptions from becoming naturalized; however, interdisciplinary meandering may not always ensure conceptual or ideological change. James Paul Gee observes that "bi-Discoursal people (people who have or *are in the process of mastering* two contesting or conflicting discourses) are the ultimate sources of change" (164; emphasis added). Min-Zhan Lu's 1989 literacy narrative, "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle," captures the often tumultuous experience of moving back and forth between discourses; and yet she concludes that the struggle and complexity of trying to re-orient herself kept her "from losing sight of the effort and choice involved in reading and writing with and through a discourse" (447). Lu's initial efforts to separate her discourses and keep them from interfering with each other also prevented her from using either constructively.

I have found the theories of teacher-educator Hilary Janks helpful for thinking about how to keep the connections between critical literacy and composition studies in play. Janks, whose work emerges from the highly multi-lingual contexts of South Africa, has developed a kind of ecological framework for examining the relationships between language, literacy, and power. Like key terms, different theories conceptualize these relationships in different ways, typically focusing on or foregrounding one part at a time. Janks's model describes four orientations (domination, access, diversity, and design). She emphasizes the importance of each orientation, while revealing the symbiotic and necessary interdependence between them. Attention to only one orientation without consideration of the others not only causes a serious lack or imbalance; there are, as Kate Vieira reminds us when she reprises Goody and Watt's question, real "consequences" for human beings and the material realities in which they inhabit or desire.

For each of these four orientations, Janks delineates what is lost when one of the others is missing from the equation. For example, an orientation toward *diversity* is crucial for recognizing and perhaps acquiring new ways of being and doing in the world. But as Janks notes, diversity without a theory of *domination* (power relations) can lead to a celebration of difference without an awareness of how difference is structured hierarchically in societies. Diversity without *access* to dominant discourses runs the risk of "ghettoizing" alternative literacies (and the people who use them). And

diversity without the opportunity for *design*, re-design, and reconstruction limits the potential that diversity offers for change (26). Thus, the problem of pluralization that Horner identifies might be seen as a problem where diversity (of forms, practices, and technologies), is privileged without a recognition of the other orientations or forces that come into play.

Janks's model also suggests why literacy and composition studies need to work together. While both fields address questions of power, access, and diversity, composition studies (or my preferred term, *writing studies*) ensures that a focus on design and redesign always remain part of the mix. Design enlarges our conception of writing and expands our available resources for meaning making. At the same time, Horner and Janks remind me that simply providing access to diverse practices, forms, and technologies for designing without also understanding how certain forms of design are privileged and perpetuated by the discourses of power risks simply replicating and reproducing these designs. Without conscious consideration of how these and other components interact with and upon each other, our orienting terms and ideological positionings are apt to both guide and follow us wherever we go.

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## Locating Ourselves and Our Work

Eli Goldblatt

**T**he essays collected for the inaugural issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies* give me great hope for our discipline. They open rich lines of conversation and suggest that the field commonly called composition/rhetoric or rhet/comp will be served well by the new journal. I like the way Kate Vieira reaches back to re-imagine and recast the old question about the “consequences of literacy,” and I value Kathryn Flannery’s warning that we must “resist romanticizing either everyday literacies or schooled literacies.” In a similar vein, Brenda Glascott’s essay on keywords helps us to recognize the dangers of our histories and unexamined vocabularies, cautioning us to avoid linguistic traps that either foreclose valuable avenues for research because of our allegiances to certain parts of the field and wariness of colleagues who identify differently. Scholars in composition, rhetoric, and literacy have been hugely productive in the last thirty years, but our growing sophistication of method and concept can also lead to specialized styles that harden into academic warrens that seal vital intellectual projects off from one another.

Both Graff and Horner emphasize and interrogate the term “location” in our shared work, and I would like to linger first on that term. I do think, with Graff, that status has subtly shaped and sometimes deformed the growth of our collective research choices. For example, I have always felt that we should have continued the fruitful collaboration with cognitive psychology initiated by Linda Flower and John Hayes, but such work would certainly have made it difficult for assistant professors to get tenure in English departments. In the same way, the split Horner identifies between research in English-based composition (primarily focused on texts) and education (the social science of practice in instruction) has something to do with the low opinion most literature faculty have of colleagues who train teachers. Even the divisions Glascott identifies—between those who key on rhetoric and those who use other terms with perhaps less “gravitas”—may have more to do with who one wishes to align with on a faculty than what work one most wishes to pursue. As Vieira usefully notes about immigrants’ use of writing, the materiality of literacy “shifts the focus from *identity* to *identification*.” After all, in the early days of comp/rhet every practitioner was something of an undocumented worker (you wrote your dissertation on *The Great Gatsby*?), venturing out into vineyards where the toil was not only poorly paid and dangerous but despised to boot. Despite our complaints today, at least those on tenure lines in the field are far less likely to be in quite so compromised a position, yet labor inequities and status issues remain a major legacy of writing studies.

But what I most want to point out is that we almost always study “literacies” within the framework of higher education, and usually within the traditions of the research university. Even those of us who call our work “community literacy” and choose to focus on school/college partnerships, literacy events in community centers or prisons, or other settings outside traditional classrooms, are often rooted in

English or education departments (whether our loads are 2/2 or 5/5). Things literate look very different if you're trying to run a local GED program, writing grants, developing curriculum, or dealing with boards. As Horner points out, the pesky stain of autonomy often won't come out in the wash no matter how many ways you rename, re-spatialize, or re-temporize literacy in the laundromat of educational innovation. Yet, when even bad schools in a neighborhood close—as it looks like at least five K-8 schools around my university will in the next year—we want to take some kind of stand and say: “No! You can't do this to our kids, teachers, janitors, secretaries, crossing guards.” What will we as scholars of literacy have to say? Where will we be when urban kids who are just as bright as the ones in the suburbs are shipped off to overcrowded schools in different neighborhoods for the sake of systemic efficiency? Of course I'm being reductive and alarmist, but really situations are far worse than I'm painting them, because I haven't even mentioned the guns and drugs on the corners or the growing American consensus that many people just might not “need” college after all.

This is of course not to say every aspect of our work isn't important. Actually, I think we have developed some valuable collective wisdom, and scholars in various parts of our field are poised to take new stock of what we know and hold ourselves responsible for the social positions we have won. I take it, again, that Vieira's invocation of the old “consequences” debate represents this impulse, and I fully expect the new journal will be a site for such a gathering of tribes. This leads me to Morris Young's article. I can't get over my own penchant for seeing literacy as human behavior always nested within relationships. It's not just that, like Young, my own professional life was influenced by a long association with Deb Brandt, my dissertation advisor when I was the first Wisconsin comp/rhet grad student. I respond to his piece because of his reminder that a given scholar's life is informed not only by the “grand narratives of scholarship” but “the little narratives of personal touchstones.” This may sound sentimental—I'm quite willing to live with that—but I'm also heeding Horner's fierce analysis of autonomy's inexorable logic. To the extent that we remember this is a human-made world, one that needs to be re-imagined regularly lest we find ourselves frozen among reified tombstones, we have a hope of resisting the regimenting logic of institutional life. I grew up in the army, where rank is worn on sleeve and shoulder. On an army post, you wait for orders even while you try to do your job right, and all too often universities remind me of military bases. It's the little narratives that keep us refreshed in the face of *habitus*.

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## Literacy and Consequences: A Response to Kate Vieira

Robert P. Yagelski

Kate Vieira resurrects what she calls the “bold” and “unpopular” question that was at the center of the controversial work of anthropologists Jack Goody and Ian Watt: What are the consequences of literacy? It’s a worthy, if difficult, question, and Vieira argues that Composition Studies “is an ideal disciplinary space from which to approach it.” As she notes, “Goody and Watt’s ‘autonomous’ theory of literacy has been rebutted. And a scholarly field of inquiry has developed in its place.” That scholarly field—what we often refer to as “literacy studies”—is a vibrant area of inquiry that, as Vieira acknowledges, has “produced careful studies of literacy’s varied relationships to social contexts and to power.” Yet for all that work, and for all its insight into the complexities of literacy, we seem to shy away from genuine engagement with the question Vieira wants answered. Why?

Vieira suggests that because the unit of analysis in Composition Studies is not culture but *writing*, Composition Studies might be able to explore the question of the consequences of literacy “without dividing the world into oral and literate, without having to take on debates that are not of our moment, and without sacrificing the crucial insights of New Literacy Studies.” Perhaps. But it might also be that we in Composition Studies face the same obstacles in addressing this question that scholars in other disciplines face. Primary among those obstacles is the very centrality of literacy itself in how we live and work together. In western culture, literacy is a given and, more to the point, generally assumed to be a good—often unequivocally so. Given what some have called western culture’s obsession with literacy (see Sartwell), it can be daunting to explore questions that have the potential to expose literacy itself as a problem whose costs can sometimes be as great as its benefits. We know that literacy can be a tool for oppression as thoroughly as it can liberate, and scholars like Harvey Graff have documented the complex and sometimes paradoxical social, economic, cultural, and even ideological impact of literacy. A few scholars have even tried to describe what might be lost when western-style literacy is taken to be the norm. Lisa Delpit, for example, paints a picture of a subtle but powerful kind of disconnection from land and community that western-style literacy instruction can foster in Native Alaskan children. For me, Delpit’s account is illuminating but deeply unsettling, and it’s no wonder that few of us seem eager to embrace the proposition that some consequences of literacy might be so undesirable, so “troubling,” as Vieira puts it. Vieira makes a very good case that we should.

Vieira’s own research shows how “[l]iteracy can sometimes empower, but often it oppresses, disenfranchises, regulates.” She goes on to argue that “if nation states, with armies and laws, agree that papers have the power to regulate movement, then they do. Texts are as strong as the strongest make them.” We already know this, of course, but research like Vieira’s, which she calls “radically social,” not only illuminates the social consequences of literacy practices but also exposes our own



complicity in those practices: “Sure,” she writes, “there are subversions and forgeries and creative misuses of literacy. But there is also mass compliance exacted through fear and through habit.” It’s easy to point to literacy practices that rest on fear, but it’s harder to see those that continue through habit—and harder still to acknowledge our own complicity in perpetuating such habit.

It may well be that current theory already enables us to understand the consequences of literacy in ways that Brian Street and others have argued, but Vieira isn’t simply offering a new twist on theory; rather, she offers a challenge to us: be willing to go where your inquiry takes you; be willing to confront questions whose answers might call into question your theories, your understanding of literacy, even, perhaps, the foundations of your field. It is an uncomfortable challenge, and it certainly touched a nerve for me. In my own efforts to understand literacy over the course of my career, I have wrestled with the ideas of Goody and Watt as well as Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, Walter Ong, and others associated with the so-called strong-text theory of literacy. My naïve but genuine belief in the power of literacy as an uncomplicated good initially drew me to their work, which seemed to give voice to what I thought I knew: that literacy changes us, and for the better.

I vividly remember sitting in one of my very first graduate seminars (nearly thirty years ago now!) listening uneasily to an older and more sophisticated student as he strenuously rejected Ong’s main thesis in his article “Literacy and Orality in Our Times,” which we had been assigned to read. The student’s charge that Ong’s analysis was not only ethnocentric but also very nearly racist made little sense to me at the time, but it profoundly shook up my comfortable belief in the power of writing to shape thinking in the (good) ways that Ong suggested. It took a while for me to understand and appreciate the critiques of strong-text theories, yet something about those theories continued to prod me, much as Vieira continues to find the questions posed by Goody and Watt “compelling.”

Vieira is primarily interested in examining the material consequences of literacy in the lives of undocumented migrants. Such an examination, she argues, “shifts the focus from *identity* to *identification*.” For many, writing becomes associated not centrally with expression or culture, but with a national tracking system that can lead to deportation, the separation of families, sometimes death. Texts, in this context, are strong.” I think she’s right, and her argument reminds me of my own struggle to reconcile these oppressive uses of literacy with my sense of its capacity to empower. My intellectual journey took me from those early encounters with Ong’s efforts to understand the cognitive consequences of writing to Paulo Freire’s provocative analysis of the transformative possibilities of literacy and his idea that literacy is essential to becoming “fully human.” “To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world,” Freire famously wrote (88). The path to becoming fully human, then, is developing a critical consciousness through his now well-known “problem-posing” literacy pedagogy. In material terms, Freire taught disenfranchised peasants to read and write so that they could overcome political and economic oppression. In this formulation, the main consequence of literacy is liberation.

Of course, Freire’s famous critique of “the banking concept of education” demonstrates that he well understood the uses of literacy as a tool for oppression. He was acutely aware of the sometimes ambiguous material consequences of literacy, in part because his analysis (which was influenced by Marxist materialism) went beyond the ideological to the ontological. Like so many readers attracted to Freire’s theories as a way to understand the political and ideological dimensions of literacy, I ini-

tially overlooked the ontological analysis that is central to his theoretical framework. Freire understood “men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (84). And in naming the world we also bring ourselves into existence. Literacy, in this sense, is fundamental to *being*.

Lately, prompted by the need to reconcile my embrace of Freire’s transformative vision with my growing uneasiness about the role that western literacy seems to play in the ongoing destruction of our planet (Yagelski), I have come to see that in addition to its social consequences, literacy—more specifically, *writing*—also has *ontological* consequences. Indeed, the social consequences of literacy might well arise from its ontological implications. For writing is wrapped up in how we understand ourselves as beings in the world, and the act of writing has the potential to shape our sense of who we are and how we relate to the world around us. But understanding writing ontologically requires looking beyond the text to the experience of creating a text, a project that literacy studies has not taken up but one that is consistent with much work in Composition Studies, including the so-called post-process theories of Thomas Kent.

So while Vieira appropriately exposes the sometimes disturbing power of text, I also want to encourage us to explore the consequences of the *act* of writing on the writer—and, by extension, on the world we share. This shift in focus from the writer’s writing to the writer *writing* can illuminate the fact that the consequences of *writing* are not the same as the consequences of the *uses* of writing. To my mind, the transformative possibilities of literacy, such as those Freire envisioned, can be more fully realized if we look beyond the text to the *experience* of writing itself.

I support Vieira’s call for us to look unflinchingly at the social consequences of literacy. At the same time, I hope we will focus not only on the text but also on the act of writing itself. I hope we will fix our scholarly gaze on the *writer writing* and examine the ways in which our literate practices are implicated in our very sense of being in the world.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> My classmate, who, as I recall, had spent time teaching in remote villages in Belize, rejected Ong’s analysis of “the psychodynamics of primary oral cultures, of primary oral noetics—how the mind works when it cannot rely directly or indirectly on writing and on the thought patterns that writing alone can initiate” (46). My classmate’s own experience with so-called “oral cultures,” he argued, suggested that there was no distinction between the “thought patterns” of people from such cultures and people from literate western cultures. Years later when I first read Scribner and Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy*, I thought of that earlier classroom discussion and understood better what my classmate was arguing.

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## Relating “Literacy,” “Rhetoric,” and “Composition”: Notes on Glascott, Graff, and Horner

Patricia Bizzell

**W**e learn from New Literacy Studies that to be literate means to be in some kind of relationship with symbols for spoken language. I may have experienced the bare minimum of literacy when I was in South Korea last year. All around me I saw mysterious symbols, on signs, shop-fronts, menus, etc. I could not read them. But I knew they were supposed to represent spoken Korean.

In our Symposium, we have three concepts in play: “literacy,” “rhetoric,” and “composition.” Brenda Glascott implies that “literacy” is the most comprehensive of the three, as it encompasses analyses of language-based “reception and production activities and artifacts,” and among these are both “other-directed” and “self-directed” genres. Following Stephen Mailloux, she implies that traditional literary studies is more limited because it is primarily concerned with the “reception” of written genres, analyzing them to determine their aesthetic merit. While traditionally, such study may have concentrated on what she calls “imaginative writing,” that is, novels and poems, it is also true that literary critics have paid attention to so-called literary nonfiction genres, such as the belletristic essay and memoir. From a theoretical point of view, we might consider all of these genres to be both “other” and “self” directed. But it’s true, literary critics typically do not explain how to produce them.

Glascott suggests that “rhetoric” is also a more limited term than “literacy” because it is concerned primarily with the “production” of “other-directed” genres such as oratory. Her references to classical rhetoric make me think that this is where she gets these parameters; arguably, classical rhetoric is primarily concerned with coaching speakers on public deliberative, forensic, and epideictic genres. In its long subsequent history, however, rhetoric has focused on other, less public oral genres, such as conversation (see, e.g., Madeleine de Scudéry), and a wide variety of written genres (see, e.g., medieval *ars dictaminis*, or textbooks on letter-writing). Rhetoricians have also evaluated the “reception” of oral and written texts, whether by analyzing their persuasive effects on audiences, or even by judging their style and structure according to aesthetic criteria very similar to what literary critics employ. As is well known, there is even a branch of literary criticism that announces itself as rhetorical, promulgated most famously by Wayne Booth but arguably, nowadays, by Mailloux.

Thus, the designation as “rhetorical” of language-using phenomena that Glascott views as more properly the domain of “literacy” studies may not be due to scholars’ desire to gain the “gravitas” associated with the classical discipline, at least not entirely (insert smiley-face here). There is, in fact, a long history of rhetoric concerning itself with “letters, memoirs, diaries, and textbooks,” as Glascott herself points out. Rhetoricians, like literacy scholars, may well be interested in texts that are not deemed to have great aesthetic merit, because studying them produces valuable insights about how

people in various times and places tried to express themselves (“self-directed”) and sometimes, to influence others (“other-directed”). Certainly we can see both of these interests animating one of the most important studies that Glascott cites, namely Jacqueline Jones Royster’s *Traces of a Stream*, in which who Royster’s subjects were and what they were trying to accomplish in their social worlds are of more interest to Royster (and me) than the aesthetic qualities of their texts.

Perhaps the over-arching human activity that holds enduring interest for scholars, whether they call themselves literary critics, literacy scholars, or rhetoricians, is how humans do things with words.

“Composition,” I believe, may indeed be a term with a more limited reach, however. “Composition” is implicated when “literacy” is redefined from the capacious boundaries that Glascott suggests to a more reified and reduced notion, such as when it appears in promises that, as Harvey Graff puts it, “a more equal distribution of a productive mass literacy will trump social, economic, and political inequality.” This is the “literacy myth,” since achieving this reified literacy may not “bring employment and rewards to all those in search of fair work and pay, *regardless* of their ability to read and write across different media and different languages” (Graff’s emphasis). Bruce Horner critiques buying into the literacy myth when he looks at writing instruction that “[makes] a fetish of specific deviations from what are thought to be formal features of academic writing by changing these features—for example, by mixing languages, or composing in a manner recognized as ‘multimodal,’ in the hope ‘that academic writing can thereby be transformed.’” One way of interpreting his point here would be to say that just because one lone composition teacher encourages her students to use Spanglish in their English-language compositions, Spanglish will not thereby become more acceptable in academic writing at large nor will the socioeconomic oppression Spanglish speakers labor under be thereby alleviated.

With the term “composition,” I reference activities that produce artifacts in school-based writing courses, which usually encourage students’ self-expression but must also attend to their abilities to satisfy audiences in other school courses. I completely agree with Horner that no composition teacher should imagine that diversifying the kinds of oral and written productions she encourages will automatically transform either the academy or the larger (unjust) society. To think so would be to “fetishize,” in Horner’s terms, one’s innovative pedagogy. Nevertheless, as long as composition teachers understand that their diversifying pedagogy cannot change the world all alone, surely Horner would not warn them away from it. After all, he is a strong advocate of a kind of diversifying pedagogy that responds to “translingualism” and that is discussed in detail in a volume he co-edited, *Cross-Language Relations in Composition*.

Horner does have another concern, of course: that diversifying pedagogies not be reified, that is, treated as “[objectified] sets of such practices and conditions, rendering them stable, internally uniform, and discrete through locating them in terms of space [in my liberated classroom?] but not temporally as the always emerging products of actions.” To do so would be to turn more diverse notions of academic writing into the sort of literacy critiqued by Graff, imagined as an entity that can be gifted by the privileged to the disadvantaged, whom it then behooves to make good use of it. Let’s not do that.

But if we keep the emphasis on practice and on the ever-developing creativity of everyone in the school setting, students and faculty, then it seems to me that “composition,” even if limited in scope to

particularly school-related kinds of language use, can become a fruitful field for literacy study and can incorporate insights from rhetoricians’ ways with words.

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## Literacy/Literacies Studies and the Still-Dominant White Center

Carmen Kynard

Many of us in composition-rhetoric studies know, cite, and use Catherine Prendergast's text, *Literacy and Racial Justice: The Politics of Learning after Brown v. Board of Education* to substantiate our claims that literacy has often, if not always, been framed as a white property. Nonetheless, I am still perplexed that there has been no real, vociferous debate around one of the book's most critical contributions, namely chapter three, on Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words*. In fact, after that chapter, it seems like the very terms we use to talk about literacy when we imagine ourselves to be talking about multiple locations, academic literacy/discourse communities, schooling, and marginalized communities should be called into question.

*Ways with Words* is a central canon in literacy studies, a product of a Post-Civil Rights/Post-*Brown* agenda at the same time that it *reproduces* that agenda. This is why Kathryn Flannery's text, "Babies and Bath Water," offers us an important reminder that the ideological discourses we are often deploying are fundamentally connected to *Ways* even though we do not always recognize this text as doing that kind of heavy lifting in composition-rhetoric studies. It seems as if our elitist tendency to distance ourselves from literacy studies, an elitism that Brenda Glascott has meticulously shown in "Constricting Keywords: Rhetoric and Literacy in Our History Writing," has left us with some blindspots. To riff off of Morris Young in his "Sponsoring Literacy Studies," we, too, can consider *Ways* a literacy sponsor to the kinds of work we have done in framing literacy in the post-*Brown* era. To take this back to Prendergast's argument, the very thing that we imagine ourselves to be pursuing in composition studies, namely the framing of contexts, histories, and ideologies in relation to literacy, has been inhibited as much as it has been promoted when *Ways with Words* acts as a framing device. To quote Harvey Graff's contribution here: "the roster of literacy studies' commissions and omissions is lengthy."

In its documentation of the literacy practices of a working class black community and a working class white community in 1960s/1970s South Carolina, alongside both communities' conflicts with the middle-class townspeople (whose discourse norms match and are sustained by schooling), Heath offered an analytical schema that suggested that non-dominant groups' social clashes with school was a cultural clash. As should be fairly obvious, the focus in our research on speech communities, discourse communities, cultural models of literacies, etc. can, thus, be traced back to or, at least, connected with *Ways*. However, Prendergast reminds us that *Ways* emerges out of and because of the Post-*Brown* mandate to desegregate, a *racial* clash that Heath always distanced herself from. While Heath's focus on the local offered important models for new research, race was as local as it was national, but is still given no real frame of analysis. If we go back to *Ways*, or (re)read Prendergast's chapter, we will remember the white working class male who said he only went to college when the town's mill (where he worked)

began hiring blacks because “when the niggers (pause), uh, the blacks, you know, started comin’ in, I knew that wasn’t for me. I wasn’t ever gonna work for no nigger” (Heath 39; Prendergrast 62). Class was never the overarching determinant of people’s identities over race in this study and this was more than just a difference in culture, especially since the black working class community found themselves poorer years after *Ways’s* publication, while the white working class community experienced much greater social mobility. My point here and my point in really thinking about Prendergast’s critical chapter has been this: when we have talked about understanding the social contexts of literacy, language, and discourse, we have done so mostly from the spaces of methodological considerations (either borrowing from history or from anthropology/ethnography); we have not done so from the perspectives of interrogating deep political and ideological shifts that have left structured inequalities and violence firmly in place, especially in reference to, but not solely based on, race. That one of our canons on the cultural-social meanings of literacy so totally eclipsed discussions of race at the first (and perhaps, now, only) time in history where schools were seriously challenged to desegregate, a book within whose clutches we are still held within, speaks to a crisis in how we have and will continue to approach literacy studies. There are contexts we see and there are the contexts we ignore but whose logics we sustain.

Kate Vieira reminds us in “On the Social Consequences of Literacy” that literacy is deeply “entangled” with upward *and* downward mobility and, therefore, with simultaneous barriers erected at streets, cities, borders, and trans-nations. I like the way Vieira challenges us to see these barriers as something other than metaphoric descriptions for rhetorical peppering that might uniquely flavor one’s research; instead, as she asserts, literacy is *doing* some things, not merely staging metaphors. Schooling, as its own form of doing, has never been exempt from unleashing exactly these same kinds of deep “entanglements.”

Bruce Horner offers me the most poignant words of caution about the ongoing political trajectory of our work that leaves a dominant center unquestioned and un(der)theorized. It seems that we have replicated what we saw with the culture wars/canon wars in the 80s and 90s: on one side, we had a Far Right obsessed with reclaiming the glory days when schooling and our social world was balanced, stable (read, white and male) and successful. On the other side, we had a kind of focus on multiculturalism, co-opted from its originary Third-Worldism framed by, for instance, the Bay Area Black Arts Movement (Smethurst). As Sylvia Wynter so forcefully argued in her 1990 letter to the California School Board in its adoption of a new “multicultural” social science textbook (that 100+ page letter was published as *Do Not Call Us Negroes: How Multicultural Textbooks Perpetuate Racism*), multiculturalism merely sprinkled on happily-ever-after stories of multiple-hued groups without any real interrogation of a centralized white power structure, structured inequalities, or racialization. Horner forthrightly suggests that our focus on multiple literacies/multiple discourse communities/academic literacies/et al. has moved us toward the same problematic space where multicultural studies now reside. This was, however, a foreseeable direction. We never wanted to deal with “ways with words” in ways that would bespeak and unspeak power and the structural violence it unleashes. We may now have no other choice since the direction in which we are headed might not get us anywhere, except right back to center.

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## New Literacy Studies: Some Matters of Concern

Mariolina Salvatori

As I write this response, the end of the term is nearing, and with it, the end of my weekly meetings with a diverse group of graduate students (literature program, writing program, school of education, composition program) enrolled in my “Literacy and Pedagogy” seminar. The issues raised by this symposium’s contributors resonate and echo back with the seminar’s term-long collective investigation, so it is from within this context and through the concerns these graduate students have articulated throughout the term that I want to join the conversation.

But first a few words about the seminar itself, the historical, theoretical, and ideological scrutiny of literacy and pedagogy it calls for, the reflexive inquiry it incites, and the contributions this kind of inquiry can make to a discussion of “the implications of Literacy Studies research, theory, and practice for Composition Studies” (*LiCS Mission Statement*). I started teaching this seminar in the late 1980s. What I had initially proposed was a seminar in histories, theories and practices of pedagogy (which eventually, led to my articulation of “pedagogy as reflexive praxis” (Salvatori 4). The intellectual atmosphere of my department at the time was beginning to be hospitable to the idea that advanced graduate students from our different programs, with their different teaching experiences and theoretical backgrounds, could benefit from such a course of study. But, it was suggested, it might be strategic for me to combine “pedagogy” with “literacy,” since as the subject of a graduate seminar, literacy would carry greater intellectual weight than pedagogy, and attract more students (and, I sensed, raise fewer faculty eyebrows). Needless to say, I was taken aback by the suggestion, but because I was equally invested in the study of theories of literacy, I complied and decided to foreground in my course proposal what would have been in any case two of my planned lines of critical inquiry: what kinds of literacy different theories of reading and writing, and their pedagogical enactments, assume and can presume to foster (*Cultural Literacy* was earning large numbers of academic and non-academic acolytes); and what can a critical and reflexive study of pedagogy contribute to and draw from the study of literacy. The “and” in the title became and has since remained the central focus of the seminar’s theoretical investigations, a nexus that through the years, because of different texts and different students, has consistently disclosed new and exciting “matters of concern” (Latour) for graduate students who are about to make crucial decisions about their professional future.

Since the very first time, the diversity of students’ backgrounds and interests led to more expansive and inclusive articulations of the seminar’s original *keywords* and concepts (Glascott), and *consequently* of the seminar’s affordances (Vieira). Even before we read Street, the use of the singular for literacy and pedagogy in the original title soon felt inaccurate, constrictive, but for bureaucratic reasons, it could not be changed. Thus “the singular” remained. But it consistently occasioned early

and productive acts of terminological and conceptual problematization.

I am retiring next year. So this is the last time I will have taught this seminar (I guess the real motivation for my writing this “little narrative” (Young) is to offer it as a thank-you note to current and former students for the literacy *they* sponsored). Undoubtedly reflective of a complicated set of local and global reasons (from departmental graduate course offerings to disciplinary trends to job market prospects), to my delight and without much prodding on my part, since our very first meeting participants have tended to invert the order of the key words in the title, consistently focusing on pedagogy as a means of investigating and assessing literacies’ affordances and they have cogently articulated trenchant critiques of what they have perceived as facile and debilitating conceptualizations of pedagogy in some of the assigned texts. Focusing on pedagogy as reflexive praxis, they have raised astute and cogent questions about the extent to which those who claim to be theorists of pedagogy need to make manifest the assumptions about the literacies that undergird their projects so that they can reflect on and assess what they can plausibly and responsibly teach. And they have raised equally astute and cogent questions about the pedagogical possibilities of *both* academic and non-academic, schooled and everyday, literacies (Flannery, Horner).

In spite of their theoretical, programmatic, intellectual and institutional heterogeneity, the ten seminar participants have tended to return, over and over again, to three sets of interlocked issues, which the six contributions to this symposium suggest should be areas of concern for the future of both literacy and compositions studies: (1) the enervating *definitional vacuity* resulting from frequently un-theorized definitions and un-reflexive uses of the terms literacy and pedagogy (emotional, sexual, political—and the list goes on); (2) *reconceptualizations of literacy* that although valuable and necessary seem to elide or take for granted *reading* and *writing*, literacy’s fundamental acts; and (3) some of the unproductive consequences of current *totalizing valorizations* of the ideological model, resulting in a lack of attention to what is a much needed inter-animation, reciprocal interrogation, and cross-pollination between schooled and everyday literacies, academic and non-academic literacies, the autonomous and ideological model of both literacy and pedagogy (Flannery, Horner, Graff, Vieira). I wish my students had had a chance to read the Symposium’s contributions: they would have been reassured about the relevance of their concerns.

In different ways, and for different purposes, the symposium’s contributors call attention to two *divides* affecting literacy scholarship and their potential limiting effects for composition studies. There is of course the original divide between autonomous and ideological models, a divide that seems to prevent literacy scholars from questioning blanket indictments and rejections of concepts, traditions, terms linked to all or most of what is on the “other” side of it. This is a recurrent, and maybe initially necessary moment in history. But I think the work of New Literacy Studies can now afford to look back, consider the negative consequences of reifying dichotomies (Graff), and uncompromisingly assess what may still be useable and necessary in what has been left behind. The other divide is within New Literacy Studies themselves: it separates non-academic from academic, schooled from ordinary literacies. While scholarship in non-academic literacy has great potential and is enormously interesting and exciting it often stops “there,” in the other context, intimating but not necessarily engaging what my students have come to formulate as a two-pronged “so what?” question : *how can*

*these understandings of literacy help us* do a better job teaching reading and writing? And *how can we use these understandings of literacy to challenge* the cultural norms of academic literacy (Horner)? One of the reasons often adduced for what seems to me a peculiar type of truncated inquiry is that non-academic literacies are not immediately applicable to classroom work (why should they be?), and to make them so would require implausible curricular and institutional changes. Yes, they might require radical changes, which institutions may not be willing to invest in. But each one of us can and needs to make an impact, even if only within one's classroom or program. We in composition studies are above all teachers. It is our responsibility to examine and to acknowledge the value of "the intellectual tools we have" (Flannery) and use them to understand that which all kinds of non-academic (and academic) literacies and knowledges can never *automatically* teach us.

Like Glascott I believe that in composition studies, theories of literacy more than studies of rhetoric are in tune with and can honor the different kinds of knowledge our students, graduate and undergraduate alike, bring to the scene of instruction, and can thus sponsor copious and reflexive understandings and responsible revisions of our pedagogies. But it is our responsibility to discern how to use them and to guide our students to develop this kind of know-how. As we learn from as wide a gamut of literacy practices as possible, we must also decide which can enable us to put pressure on and re-form traditional practices and curricula that otherwise risk becoming unrecognizable and unreadable relics of the past; which can enable us to engage the needs of individual students; and which, in some institutional settings, might be actually drained of their power, become ineffective, and even counterproductive.

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## Undoing Composition?

Allan Luke

Literacy studies raise a major challenge for the field of composition: the adequacy and stability of its historical foundations in rhetoric studies. The cultural and historical, anthropological and sociological turn in literacy studies disrupted two long-standing monopolies on normative, canonical definitions of reading and writing held by, respectively, English literary studies and reading psychology. Three decades after *Ways with Words* and *The Literacy Myth*, we now have a major corpus of social scientific studies of local and historical reading and writing practices, affiliated cultural scripts and texts, diverse and eccentric interpretive communities, and affiliated social and political relations of power.

It is now almost a cliché in the field to begin from a critique of universalist, autonomous models of reading, writing and literacy. The new consensus, reflected in this symposium, is that the social practices of writing are evident in micro-sociological and ethnographic accounts of community and everyday uses, and that these practices sit within macro-sociological political economies that attempt to govern the ownership and control of texts (Castells). The micro-analysis by Heath and colleagues, using Hymes's ethnography of communication, recorded a previously unrecognized diversity of everyday "literacy events" of African-American communities, working-class Whites, migrants, linguistic and religious minority groups, women and children. Together with critical work on literacy and the British working class by Hoggart and Williams, these community-based studies set the grounds for a new critique of canonical approaches to reading and writing.

At the same time, the emergence of new technologies over the last three decades has generated a "second wave" of literacy studies, focusing on new communities, identities and practices affiliated with new media and digital arts. Studies of multiliteracies and multi-modality are the new core business of educational and social science researchers (see Cope and Kalantzis). Taken together, the last three decades of literacy studies has succeeded in destabilizing the premise of autonomous and intrinsic models of literacy: an unquestioned belief in the durable value of a received, Eurocentric canon of texts, practices and "ways with words." Simply, new and blended texts, communities of readers and writers, bloggers and tweeters, new forms of identity and social interaction are developing as we speak—and literacy studies researchers are steaming away trying to document, describe, interpret, theorise and, indeed, prognosticate the directions and consequences of this new textual universe for those in cities and hinterlands, for dominant and minority communities, for elite and marginal classes—North, South, East and West. These matters come into play each time we scan a headline about Wikileaks, internet censorship and control, or whenever we speculate on the social effects of blogs, tweets and webpages.

Historically, the definition of what counts as “literacy,” “reading and writing,” has depended on those institutions that have “sponsored” literacy, to use a key term in this symposium. Schools, churches, mosques and universities tend to reify and naturalize literacy, creating a “selective tradition” of cultural scripts for its ideological contents and everyday uses (Luke, *Literacy*). In so doing, they enable and constrain particular bodily and cognitive practices. Yet as much as these institutions attempt to “control” the social construction of literacy, they also tend to be caught up in a continuous game of catch-up, trying to critique, override and, in instances, appropriate the dynamics of linguistic and textual exchange by everyday users and interpretive communities. Foucault’s description of the “eccentric” local uses and uptakes of discourse holds, regardless of attempts by the state and by multinational media and information corporations to control, survey and profit from what people do with texts.

This said, let’s return to the field of composition studies. Via the National Council of Teachers of English, prototypical journals like *College Composition and Communication*, *English Education*, and later journals like *Writing in the Two Year College*, the field of composition studies was defined by historically evolving relations of rhetoric programs, composition and writing programs in universities, and, most recently given the change in student demography, programs in English as a Second Language and English for specialized and “academic” purposes. *College Composition and Communication* provided an activist platform for composition scholars and teachers, post-Dartmouth, to raise issues of dialect, cultural diversity, and “students’ right to their own language.” Yet the field of composition studies has often been treated as a service area of remedial instruction, relegated to a subordinate position in university status and funding. It is hardly surprising, then, that composition and writing have sat in complementary and, at times, vexed relationships with traditional and postmodern literary studies in university English literature departments (which, historically, were invented almost a century *after* the establishment of rhetoric studies in Scotland and England).

The establishment and consolidation of composition studies into an academic *and* social field, then, has required a reification of writing into a *universal* phenomenon: that is, the assumption derived from the Sophists and Scottish rhetoricians and grammarians that there are generalizable and transferable approaches to spoken and written expression, and specifically to the teaching and learning of writing. Recall that one of the antagonistic objects of the New Literacy Studies has been the century long reification of reading into a scientifically measureable and technically reproducible human behavior by psychologists from Thorndike onwards. Here I want to propose a parallel caveat against the core assumption of many working in the field of composition studies: that there are generalizable and universal ways of teaching writing.

The turn towards ideological analyses of literacy was based as much in historical analyses, political economic analyses of literacy and power as it was produced through ethnographic and field-observational studies. Other important “critical” orientations to literacy have emerged. I here refer to the use of critical discourse analyses in a range of forms—from Foucauldian genealogical analyses to the political hermeneutics of Norman Fairclough, to Teun van Dijk and colleagues in journals like *Critical Discourse Studies* and *Discourse and Society*.

This work has the potential to push composition studies down two further lines of inquiry. First, there is a continuing need to document how the shaping of literacy in social institutions like schools and universities is complicit in ideological control, access to economic and social power, and, indeed, cultural inclusion and exclusion. This imperative isn't an abstraction for my academic colleagues and students who work in universities and schools in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, China, and other countries where boundaries over who can read, write and speak, about what, to whom, always sit slightly uncomfortably below the surface of pedagogic and scholarly exchange. The obvious point here—whether we pursue it formally through neomarxian ideology critique or via structuralist sociological analyses (Albright and Luke)—is that any formulation of an “ideological model” (Street) requires a thoroughgoing analysis of ideology per se, of class and cultural, state and corporate interests at work in the formation of specific text types, and, indeed, in the normative formation of particular kinds of literate human subjects, to the exclusion of others.

The second line of inquiry concerns the emergence of discourse analytic work that focuses on the knowledge/field specificity of discourse and genre (Lemke). Beginning from Halliday's systemic functionalist linguistics—the argument of Lemke, Fairclough and others is that the broader agenda of critical literacy is about teaching students to unpack the relationships between specific text types, and lexico-grammatical formations that have value in particular social/institutional fields. Their analytic point is that each social and institutional field, disciplinary field of thought and knowledge paradigm, develops specialist vocabularies and, indeed, highly specialized and dynamic generic forms. Further, this is done in relation to the affordances and possibilities of particular communications media (from print to blog).

This model doesn't overtly conflict with traditions of “genre” advocated in the field of college composition and communication, back to the work of Kenneth Burke and his Chicago colleagues, many of whom were avid students of Aristotelian philosophy. For Burke, social function was accounted for in terms of specific “grammars of motives.” But it potentially marks out yet another historical face-off between Gorgias and Aristotle: the assumption that writing, its forms and approaches, right down to lexical choice and sentence-level grammar depends on social purposes (Aristotelian “final causes”) realized in relation to disciplinary and knowledge formations. In their analysis of *Origin of Species*, Halliday and Martin show how the core social functions of scientific categorization and taxonomy generate specific lexico-grammatical and generic designs. In sociological terms, Basil Bernstein argues that different fields “classify” and “frame” knowledge differently, with distinctive foci on disciplinary boundaries and interdisciplinarity, and with different degrees of what he refers to as “verticality,” that is, depth of knowledge. At the same time, how knowledge is classified and framed, named and constructed in any specific field is neither benign nor politically disinterested. Here Bourdieu's analysis of “homo academicus” establishes the role of “discipline” in the establishment and maintenance of knowledge/power hierarchies in universities.

This raises a number of questions about the field of composition as it is institutionally constituted and located. If the institutional demands of student composition are always field-specific



and, perhaps, even paradigm specific, the days of “generic,” universal, cross-institutional ways of teaching “writing” may be numbered—particularly in increasingly specialized, technical and professional university programs. Writing essays for English classes does not translate into efficacy at writing laboratory notes, right down to the mastery of specific sentence-level grammatical formations (e.g., transitive versus intransitive, passive versus active, kinds of sentence-level modality). Nor will it necessarily transfer to the construction of webpages or participation in online discussion. There is already a shift in many institutions from university-wide college composition programs, remedial writing interventions and ESL programs to field specific programs lodged in host departments and faculties. The emergence of “writing for engineers” or “writing for accountants” are responses to the specific knowledge demands of professional fields—as is the move from generic English-as-a-Second language programs to English-for-Specific Purposes programs. One leading East Asian university has specialist writing courses for training Mandarin-speaking engineers in the conventions of the English-language PhD thesis in the field of engineering. This situation is further complicated by the increase of digitally-researched, interactively produced, multi-modal and mixed genre assignments in both high school and university courses.

Can the field keep up? Simply, if the (now old) “new literacy studies” has yielded a focus on context, locality and knowledge/power relations—this, in itself, should set the grounds for an analytic and practical “de-reification” of writing and composition as they stand. My polemical point is that this may require a reconnoitering of the field’s historical roots in Scottish and American rhetoric—and, at the least, an engagement with three sets of issues that have been placed on the table by the “critical” turn in literacy studies and discourse analyses: (1) the role of discipline/field/knowledge/power configurations in shaping what counts as writing, text and discourse; (2) the changing linguistic and cultural resources of students and aspiring writers wrought by the permanent disruption of mainstream demographics in all “Western” school and university systems; and, last but hardly least, (3) the core epistemological and textual issues raised by shifts in the modalities of communications to digital and post-print forms. Neither the canon, nor the cohort, nor the media remain the same.

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## INFORMATION FOR WRITERS

*LiCS* seeks submissions that interpret literacy at a time of radical transformation in its contexts and circulation. Please email submissions to [licsjournal@gmail.com](mailto:licsjournal@gmail.com). Manuscripts (up to 10,000 words) should demonstrate awareness of relevant scholarship in both Literacy and Composition Studies and document sources according to MLA style (3rd ed.). To ensure anonymity during the review process, please eliminate any identifying information in the manuscript and attach a separate cover letter and ~200-word abstract. Manuscripts must not be previously published or under consideration elsewhere. Time from initial submission to publication decision is approximately 8 to 10 weeks.

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*LiCS* welcomes submissions of short essays (between 1,000—5,000 words) that continue the symposium conversation begun in the inaugural issue. Manuscripts received before May 15 will be considered for the fall 2013 issue. Manuscripts received after May 15 will be considered for subsequent issues. Please email symposium submissions to [licsjournal@gmail.com](mailto:licsjournal@gmail.com).

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